

Bertha Matilda Honoré Palmer
President of the Board of Lady Managers,
Socialite, Woman's Advocate, and Entrepreneur

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Liberal Studies.

Bertha Matilda Honoré Palmer
President of the Board of Lady Managers,
Socialite, Woman's Advocate,
and Entrepreneur

Monica Teulaff, Ph.D.
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**Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate
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for the degree
Master of Liberal Studies
in the Division of Liberal Arts and Science
Indiana University**

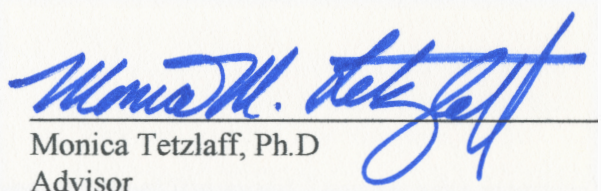
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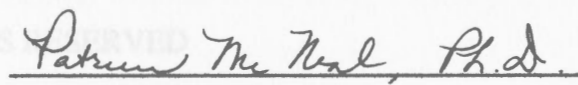
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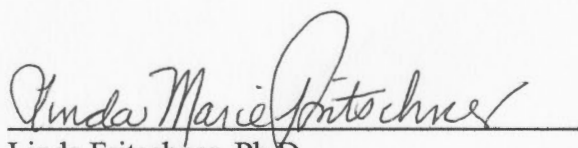
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Monica Tetzlaff, Ph.D
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Date of Oral Examination

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This work is dedicated to my husband, Michael Raymond Lawson, who stood by me, encouraged me, and supported me as I was first, frustrated, and doubtful of my own abilities. During all of our years together, you have been my source of strength and my best friend. You have supported my education or made it through the hard times without you. With all of my heart, I thank you and cherish you.

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It is with deep gratitude that I thank my advisor, Monica Terzslafi, for her time, help, and guidance, during the compilation of this thesis. Monica went beyond her role as my advisor. For her comfort, support, insight, and wisdom, I am

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It is with deep gratitude that I thank my advisor, Monica Tetzlaff, for her time, help, and guidance, during the compilation of this thesis. Monica went beyond her role as my advisor. For her comfort, support, insight, and wisdom, I am indebted. I would also like to thank Dr. Patricia McNeal and Dr. Linda Fritschner for taking time away from their busy schedules to participate on my panel. The many helpful suggestions they gave improved the quality of this paper. I am also indebted to Dr. Pat Furlong, whose unique teaching style sparked my interest in Chicago and its history. To my children, Kerry, Melissa, Michael, Matthew, Kameron, and Kelsey, thank you for understanding how important completing this thesis was to me and for giving me the uninterrupted time to finish it.

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American Woman Suffrage Association	AWSA
Board of Lady Managers	BLM
Chicago Historical Society	CHS
Chicago's Woman's	CWC
Dearborn Seminary	Dearborn
Georgetown Academy	Visitation
National Woman Suffrage	NWSA
National American Woman Suffrage Association	NAWSA
National Council of Woman	NCW
Queen Isabella Society	QIS
St. Xavier's	St. Xavier's
Women's Trade Union League	WTUL
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St. Xavier's Academy	St. Xavier's
Women's Trade Union League	WTUL
World's Columbian Exposition of 1893	WCE

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Bertha's father, Henry Honoré, moved his family to Chicago in 1855.¹ Only thirty years after its incorporation as a city, Chicago had begun to develop into the industrial center of the United States, but not without growing pains.

Chicago's growth into a metropolis helped to create over two hundred millionaires by 1890.² Gustavus Swift and Philip Armour made their fortunes in Chicago's stockyards. George Pullman became a millionaire through his planned cities and railroad cars. Potter Palmer made his fortune first in retail and then in real estate. Marshall Fields and Levi Leiter became rich after purchasing Potter Palmer's store.

¹William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991) 328.

²Robert Mueselgrono, *Celebrating the New World: The Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993) 17.

Introduction

Bertha Matilda Honoré Palmer was born in Louisville, Kentucky, May 22, 1849 and died May 5, 1918 in Sarasota, Florida. Bertha Palmer's accomplishments crossed all areas of her life, including her roles as "the" socialite of Chicago, her work for nearly four years as the President of the Board of Lady Managers (BLM), of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (WCE), as a successful entrepreneur, and as an advocate for working women. Although she was born in Kentucky, Bertha Honoré's life and her growth into an independent and prosperous woman, were closely linked to the growth and prosperity of the city of Chicago.

The stench of the stockyards permeated the air and mud filled the streets when Bertha's father, Henry Honoré, moved his family to Chicago in 1855.¹ Only thirty years after its incorporation as a city, Chicago had begun to develop into the industrial center of the United States, but not without growing pains.

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²Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: The Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993) 17.

While the rich got richer, the distinction and distance between the social classes also grew.

The working poor of Chicago included record numbers of immigrants. In 1850 nearly one-half of Cook County's inhabitants were immigrants and nearly all lived in Chicago.³ By the end of the nineteenth century almost 400,000 of Chicago's 1.7 million residents were immigrants who lived in unhealthy conditions.⁴ English, French, German, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants not only moved to Chicago, but most moved into their already established ethnic areas of the city. The lack of adequate housing, improper sanitation, lawlessness, inadequate and unhealthy factory conditions for the working poor, and the lack of child labor laws, permeated their everyday lives.⁵ In Chicago, as the distinctions between social classes grew so did social and civic reform movements.

Many wealthy women of privilege began to view these problems as their problems. The "invisible careers" these women had held, taking care of the home, the children, volunteering at schools and for civic and social functions, adorning their husband's arms, attending endless teas and luncheons, and entertaining their husband's

³Cronon, 104

⁴Donald Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997) 457.

⁵Cronon, 104.

business associates, did not satisfy their desire to do something more.⁶ Many women were no longer satisfied in the cult of domesticity.⁷ The gilded cage of the home began to feel like a private prison and a new woman was beginning to appear. Women, like Jane Addams, Julia Lathrop, Ellen Starr, and Bertha Palmer were moving into the public sphere like butterflies from cocoons-- ready to fly. The emergence of this "new woman" began to affect the social and civic direction Chicago took.

Historians, Nancy Woloch and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg each present some defining attributes of this new woman.⁸ A combination of Woloch's and Smith Rosenberg's definition of the new woman is: a woman who was born between 1850-1920, a wife or daughter of a middle or upper-class man, a woman with a better than average education, a woman who lived in the city and who wanted the same rights and privileges accorded men.⁹ Bertha Matilda Honoré Palmer possessed many of these attributes.

Although Bertha Palmer did not view or proclaim herself as a "new woman" she

⁶The term "invisible careers" is a term used by Arlene Kaplan Daniels in *Invisible Careers: Women Civil Leaders from the Volunteer World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) to describe the volunteer work middle and upper class women do without payment. This issue will be discussed further in chapter four.

⁷Thomas A. Bailey and David M. Kennedy, *The American Pageant* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1991) 302.

⁸Both the Woloch and Smith-Rosenberg definitions of the "new woman" will be given further attention in chapter's two and three.

⁹Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) 269 and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) 175-177.

certainly acted as one. Women of the Victorian Age were considered as the property of their husbands and/or fathers. Regarded as “perpetual minors,” women of Bertha’s generation could not vote and could not retain title to property.¹⁰ Bertha Palmer did not consider herself as the property of anyone. While she managed her home and children, she was neither submissive nor subservient to her husband. Palmer did what she thought was best for her family and for the citizens of Chicago because she had the power, education, and independence to do so, without asking others for permission.

Her social position by her birth, her marriage to Potter Palmer, a millionaire twice her age, her education, her links to the White House, and to English and Russian royalty, helped to create the power Bertha possessed. Bertha, active during the Gilded Age, could have spent her time simply entertaining the idle rich, but she chose to work for the rights of women and to turn Chicago into a city of culture and taste. Elegant, quiet, persuasive, independent, and intelligent, Bertha Palmer worked tirelessly to turn Chicago into a city that would rival the East coast, both culturally and socially. What made Bertha Palmer distinctive was not just her long list of accomplishments, but the quiet, determined, and diplomatic manner in which she worked to achieve her goals.

Bertha’s childhood was unaffected by many of the problems associated with rapid industrialization, during the time her family lived in an upper-middle class Chicago neighborhood. As Bertha grew, she came to love Chicago. When she moved into the public sphere, Bertha worked to change the social and political ills that became widely

¹⁰Bailey, 327.

associated with Chicago.

Bertha's upper class status, and the privileges clearly associated with such a position, made it easier for her to become involved in helping the less fortunate. It is also true that while many upper class women felt it their responsibility to help solve the social evils of their city and provide for the poor, other women became active in civic and social issues to enhance their social position. Bertha, already established as the leader of Chicago's high society, did not need to become involved in the civic or social issues plaguing Chicago to enhance her social position. By the time Bertha entered the public sphere, her reputation as the grand dame of Chicago's high society had been firmly established. Bertha was concerned about the rights and education of working women. Her desire to reshape Chicago socially and culturally came from her upbringing, and her husband's personal work ethic. However, Bertha also possessed the complicated, yet simple belief that men and women should be treated as equals. With the power of many of Chicago's leading women's clubs behind her, like the Fortnightly Club and the Chicago Woman's Club, (CWC) Bertha worked to create a better city for all of its citizens.

If words like "feminist" or "suffragist" described Bertha Palmer's work for women when she lived, she would have disagreed with such a label.¹¹ Palmer, always

¹¹The term feminist is used in this paper to refer to those women who advocated the political and social rights of women equal to those of men. The term suffragist, commonly used in most resource material used for this paper, does not accurately describe the desires of the women discussed. Obtaining the right to vote, was only a portion of the agenda these women fought for.

aware of the implications of such words, would have agreed with the more politically neutral, yet accurate, term of woman's advocate to describe her activities. Yet, if Palmer had known that the word feminist, a term used after 1910, was meant "to represent a battery of demands exceeding that of the suffrage movement," perhaps they might have used the term to describe her own desires and beliefs.¹² Palmer was a spokesperson, patron, and supporter of the rights of women. It is unclear if Palmer was a supporter or opponent of the suffrage movement. However, when labor reformers joined Susan B. Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), they had a supporter in Palmer.¹³

Although Bertha believed that the *best* place for a woman was in a home protected by a loving man, she was also a realist who knew that many women did not live the life of privilege that she did. Bertha Palmer was a vocal advocate for the education of women, a staunch supporter of the rights of working women, and a critic of the businessmen who sought to oppress and abuse the women who worked for them. She believed that a woman, using her intelligence and femininity, could accomplish great things. According to Bertha, too many women and children were working in unsafe factories and living in filthy homes, to wait for the possibility of equal rights tomorrow. Particularly during the 1893 Exposition, Bertha Palmer spoke for those who had neither the money, nor the position, to make their voices heard.

¹²Woloch, 344.

¹³Woloch, 308.

Palmer gained international recognition for her role as the President of the Board of Lady Managers to the 1893 World Columbian Exposition and became recognized as the nation's hostess. Initially, the all-male commission created the Board simply as a concession to women, but Bertha had other plans. As a forceful and proud representative of Chicago, Bertha made two trips to Europe, in 1890 and 1891, convincing nearly every country she contacted to send a delegation of women to the Exposition. By addressing the United States and Illinois State legislatures, Bertha received allocations of \$280,000 for the construction and operation of a separate Woman's Building. No detail was too small to be overlooked by Bertha, as she oversaw the planning, construction, and everyday management of the Woman's Building.

Palmer made many speeches about the lack of adequate education and wages for the women who had to work, during the Chicago Exposition. In a speech at the opening of the Woman's Building, Bertha said many women were forced to work because "the necessity for their work under present conditions is too evident and too urgent to be questioned, they must work or they must starve."¹⁴ Bertha made many speeches that attacked the men in industry who took advantage of the cheap labor obtained by hiring women and children, and the husbands and fathers who either could not, or would not, support their families. During her speech at the closing of the Woman's Building, Bertha said:

... If we consider it an established principle that it is the duty of the

¹⁴Address by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building. *Addresses and Reports of Mrs. Potter Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNally 1894) 134.

husband and father to maintain his wife and children, then we must look at the fact in the face that most men are failures. . . . We have heard for years of the incompetent wife and mother, but it occurs to me that we have heard singularly little of the incompetent husband and father. . . . It would now seem to be the fact that very few marriages could now occur if women were not able to assist in maintaining the home. Perhaps we are, however unreasonable in expecting men at the present stage of civilization to support their families unassisted by their wives.¹⁵

Well aware of the economic panic that had spread across the United States in late 1893,

Bertha understood that in many homes it took two incomes just to survive, as it does

today. Bertha's remarkable diplomatic disposition, and her social position, allowed her

to verbally attack the wealthy men she entertained in her home, without alienating them.

Her self-assured personality served Bertha well during the four years she worked for the

Exposition. Like anyone, Bertha had her critics, but they were small in number and were

usually women who felt Bertha received too much praise for her work with the

Exposition.

Bertha dealt with hundreds of women, their desires, jealousies, and whims.

Because she received and exercised total control of the Woman's Building during the

Exposition, some of Bertha's peers considered her too self-assured, too popular, too rich,

and too powerful. Despite the sometimes intense criticism, Bertha chose to work for the

good of *all* women, instead of bowing to the demands of a few powerful women.

Bertha Palmer is also known as the woman who introduced the United States to

¹⁵Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Closing of the Woman's Building. October 31, 1893. *Addresses and Reports of Mrs. Potter Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNealy, 1894) 155.

impressionist art during the Exposition. Palmer collected impressionist art and recognized its beauty years before it was popular in the United States.¹⁶ Bertha obtained the bulk of her impressionist collection during her trips abroad in connection with the world's fair of 1893. However, in 1900 she returned to France to search for additional art as she fulfilled her duties as an official representative of the United States to the Paris World's Fair.

Unable to hold political office in the United States because of her sex, Bertha enjoyed some political success as she worked for the 1893 and the 1900 World's Fairs. One of the few women appointed to represent the United States to the Paris World's Fair, French officials awarded Bertha Palmer their country's highest honor, the French Legion of Honor, in recognition of her work. Only two women, Florence Nightingale and Rosa Bonheur had received this honor before Bertha Palmer.¹⁷ After the fair in 1900, an article in the Paris magazine *Munsey* wrote of this remarkable woman:

Other women have won high social position, some have gained business success, and a few have won honors in politics. They have felt that they have accomplished much by achieving their ambition in one line of endeavor. Mrs. Palmer has distinguished herself in all three.¹⁸

The article in *Munsey* accurately described Bertha's success as a "new woman."

¹⁶Today, the Chicago Art Institute contains a large portion of Bertha's French Impressionist paintings, many that are considered priceless, in the collection known as the "Palmer Collection."

¹⁷Maddox, Mary, *The Woman Beautiful: An Unusual Glimpse of Mrs. Palmer* (Chicago: Rand McNealy, 1909) 22.

¹⁸Maddox, 23.

Dressed in the trappings of a proper Victorian woman, Bertha spoke and acted as a new woman. Moving into the public sphere with a self-assurance that few women possessed, Bertha Palmer worked to improve the lives of those less fortunate. Using the financial, social, and educational tools she possessed, Bertha Palmer created a distinguished legacy for herself and for the cities of Sarasota and Chicago.

The roles and contributions of Bertha Palmer in the private sphere as a wife and mother will be briefly considered. Bertha's entrance into the public sphere, as a socialite, an advocate, and as an entrepreneur, will also be addressed. Perhaps Bertha's greatest accomplishments and advancements for women were achieved during her work as the President of the Board of Lady Managers which will be covered in detail.

Bertha Palmer lived during a time of great change and turmoil in the United States. She enjoyed the privileges associated with the Gilded Age and represented "conspicuous consumption."¹⁹ She epitomized a definition of the Victorian ideal of a woman, the "perfect lady that was the perfect symbol of status."²⁰ Yet she helped to bring change through social and civic reform as women of the Progressive Era did.²¹ It is my hope that others might be able to see not just a woman of privilege and position in this paper, but an example of the new strong and independent woman that

¹⁹Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin, *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1978) 27.

²⁰Delamont, 27.

²¹Dorothy and Carl Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) xi.

emerged in the United States. Although she was bound by many of the cultural constraints and conventions of her time, Bertha was unwilling to remain submissive and quiet within the private sphere. Bertha Palmer was a woman with the strength and determination to bring about change. She was gracious in victory, dignified in defeat, and unafraid to voice her opinions and beliefs. A friend to reformers, feminists, and politicians, Bertha Palmer represented what women had been and what they would become--a new woman.

In 1853, when Bertha was four years old her father, Henry Hamilton Honoré, visited Chicago. Henry grew up listening to tales of Chicago told to him by his grandfather, Benjamin Lockwood, stationed at Fort Dearborn in the 1830s. After her visit, Henry saw the same potential for the city that his future business associate, and son-in-law, Potter Palmer had in 1832.²² Leaving his family's hardware business in Louisville, Henry moved his family to Chicago in 1855.

Henry and Eliza Honoré settled in a comfortable home on Rushen Street, which later became Ashland Avenue. The Honoré family eventually included two daughters and four sons.²³ Adrian Honoré, who would become one of Bertha's closest friends, confidants, and financial advisors, was the eldest child and son, followed by Bertha, her

²²"Chicago Mourns Death of Honore." Unidentified newspaper clipping in the Honoré file, Chicago Historical Society.

²³See illustrations for a picture Mr. and Mrs. Henry Honoré.

Chapter One: Bertha Matilda Honoré Palmer and Family

Little is known about Bertha Matilda Honoré's early years. Bertha's parents could not have known that their daughter would become such an important part of the history and development of Chicago, Illinois and Sarasota, Florida. There are no diaries of Bertha's life and she did not write an autobiography before she died. What we do know is that chance and circumstance played a large part in the life she would live. By chance, Bertha was the daughter of a wealthy businessman and lived a privileged life. The decision Bertha's father made to move his family to Chicago set into motion a chain of events that altered her life forever.

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²²"Chicago Mourns Death of Honore." Unidentified newspaper clipping in the Honore file, Chicago Historical Society.

²³Herbert Kogan and Robert Griggs, *The Great Chicago Fire of 1871* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1963).

²³See illustrations for a picture Mr. and Mrs. Henry Honoré.

sister, Ida, and her brothers, Henry, Nathaniel, and Lockwood. Henry Honoré, proud of his French heritage, made sure that his children spoke fluent French, which served Bertha well in her adult years. The Honoré family became involved in shaping the future of Chicago.

Henry became one of Chicago's earliest developers by buying and selling real estate for fellow Kentuckians who asked him to secure property for them in the Chicago area.²⁴ Expanding his business by buying, selling, and subdividing property, Henry established himself as an influential and wealthy businessman. Known as fair and honest, Henry was well liked by the citizens of Chicago. One local admirer described Henry Honoré enthusiastically saying, "To say that in adversity and prosperity alike he was ever approachable, genial, courteous, tells not of the extreme kindliness of his eye, the heartiness of his grasp, nor the almost boyish enthusiasm of his address."²⁵ As Bertha grew, she developed the same gentle nature, even disposition, and concern for others that her father possessed.

Bertha's sense of *noblesse oblige* came from her parents. Raised to believe that with wealth and privilege there came a responsibility to aid the less fortunate, civic duty and public service became a part of Bertha's life. When the Civil War approached, the Honorés helped to organize the Sanitary Fairs of 1863 and 1865. The Sanitary Fairs were exhibitions of nursing techniques held to raise money for the Union army's field

²⁴Ishbel Ross, *Silhouette in Diamonds: The Life of Mrs. Potter Palmer* (New York: Harper, 1960) 6.

²⁵Herman Kogan and Robert Cromie, *The Great Chicago Fire of 1871* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1971) 20.

hospitals.²⁶ All of the Honorés participated in the fairs by rolling bandages, saving scraps of material, and organizing sewing circles.²⁷ Bertha developed a concern for others, particularly those unable to defend themselves, at a young age. Bertha Honoré was also very young when her father's business associate, Potter Palmer, decided that this was the girl he would marry.

Potter Palmer was born in February 1826 in Potter's Hollow, New York, to Quakers Benjamin and Rebecca Palmer.²⁸ The fourth of seven children born into a farming family, Potter spent most of his youth working in mercantile stores in Lockport and Oneida, New York. However, after a trip to Chicago Potter felt that he had found an overlooked group of prospective customers in this rough new city.

In 1852 Potter arrived in Chicago from New York. The business district was on Lake Street and the sidewalks were just planks of wood. Yet, only nineteen years after its official incorporation as a city, Chicago already had a theater, fifty-four churches, three colleges, seven public halls, three hospitals, 308 factories, and one merchant for every ninety-two persons.²⁹ Potter, an astute young man, saw past the muddy streets and shanties that comprised the business district and saw his future and the future of Chicago.

With the five-thousand dollars given to him by his father, Potter opened a dry

²⁶Jeanne M. Weiman, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1981) 19.

²⁷Ross, 21.

²⁸Potter's Hollow was founded by ancestors of Potter Palmer's mother, whose maiden name was Potter.

²⁹Lloyd Wended and Herman Kogan, *Give the Lady What She Wants!* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1952) 22.

goods store on Lake Street called *P. Palmer Dry Goods and Carpets*.³⁰

Potter Palmer and Henry Honoré became business associates, and friends, and began collaborating on several real estate deals. Potter became a frequent guest in the Honoré home. Potter knew the Honorés from the time Bertha was six years old, but it was in 1862, that Potter saw Bertha in a new light.³¹ At a small gathering of friends in her parents' home, thirty-six-year-old Potter Palmer saw what a beautiful young lady Bertha was becoming.³² Unknown to Bertha, Potter Palmer chose her for his wife that night, when she was only thirteen years old. While Bertha attended school, and sang in the First Christian Church choir, Henry's and Potter's businesses continued to grow.³³

By the early 1860s Potter's store dominated the other Lake Street stores, both in sales and in size. As Bertha grew she would often shop with her mother at Palmer's store. Filled with the newest fashions from New York and Paris, Potter's store offered home delivery, liberal return policies, and credit options, unheard of business practices for the time. Until Palmer opened his store, *caveat emptor*, or let the buyer beware, was the policy in retail trade.³⁴ According to Donald Miller, Potter's store also became successful because he encouraged unescorted women to shop or simply to browse in his

³⁰Muccigrosso, 17.

³¹See illustrations for a picture of young Bertha Honoré.

³²Evelyn Witter, *The Life and Times of Bertha Honoré*. Online. Electronic Library of www.2library.com 4 April 1997.

³³Unidentified obituary clippings in the Honoré file at the CHS.

³⁴Chicago Historical Society, *The World's Fair and her Enterprising Sons* (Chicago: United Publishing, Co., 1892) 242.

store and gave personal attention to each customer.³⁵ However, after Bertha married Potter, others remembered the special treatment Bertha always received when shopping in Potter's store.³⁶ In 1864, at the age of thirty-six, Potter's health, which was always fragile, began to suffer due to his dedication to his store. Planning for an extended trip to Europe to regain his health, and to have time to plan his newest business venture, Palmer sold his store to former employees Marshall Field and Levi Leiter.³⁷

In addition to running his store, Potter Palmer had purchased several small pieces of Chicago property. Palmer enjoyed buying real estate, particularly if he could "buy low and sell high," which later became his, and his wife's, real estate motto.³⁸ The dirty, narrow, and dilapidated buildings on Lake Street bothered Potter as he walked to his store each day. Deciding that the little used State Street area would be a more desirable location for the heart of Chicago's business district, Potter bought most of the street widened State Street by twenty-seven feet and began construction on several buildings. Renting many of his buildings to his former Lake Street associates, Potter gained a reputation for being a fair and honest businessman.³⁹ Once Potter was sure that his real estate plans were progressing, he left for Europe. While Palmer traveled in Europe,

³⁵Miller, 140.

³⁶Witter, *The Life and Times of Bertha Palmer*, 28.

³⁷Margo H. Hobbs, "Bertha Palmer's Philanthropy in the Arts." M.A. Thesis School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1992.

³⁸Unidentified biographical sketch of Potter Palmer. Potter Palmer Papers, Chicago Historical Society.

³⁹Wendt and Kogan, *Give the Lady*, 33.

Bertha also changed, growing into a self-assured, intelligent, and a beautiful young woman.

The Honorés believed that their children should receive the best education available. Although the Honorés were Episcopalians, they felt that the best education for Bertha, at the time, was in the privately run Catholic schools. Bertha received all of her education in two Catholic all-girls schools in Chicago, and one in Georgetown, in Washington, D.C.

The first school Bertha attended was St. Xavier's Academy, (St. Xavier's) founded in 1849 by the Sisters of Mercy.⁴⁰ When Bertha attended St. Xavier's in the late 1850s, it stood on the corner of 29th Street and Wabash Avenue.⁴¹ There were no age requirements, but the ability to pay determined the admission standards.⁴² The records of Bertha's attendance at St. Xavier's were lost in the Chicago Fire of 1871, but it is assumed, based upon her age, that she attended in the early 1860s.⁴³ According to St. Xavier's archivist, Sister Joy Clough, when Bertha attended the school it was primarily a grammar school.⁴⁴ Many classes were held in the same room, with the older students

⁴⁰With an enrollment of more than 2000 girls, St. Xavier's, now known as Mother McAuley's Liberal Arts High School, is the largest private high school, male, female, or coeducational, in the United States.

⁴⁰Ross, 10.

⁴¹Because the school was burned down in the Chicago Fire of 1871, exact records of Bertha's attendance were lost. The date given is an estimation.

⁴²Sister Joy Clough, St. Xavier's University. Telephone interview. 7 October 1997.

⁴³Sister Joy Clough, St. Xavier's University. Telephone interview. 7 October 1997.

⁴⁴In 1969 St. Xavier's became a coeducational college and a university in 1992. The girls high school began operating under the name of Mother McAuley's Liberal Arts High School.

receiving additional class work. After attending St. Xavier's, Bertha attended Chicago's Dearborn Seminary, (Dearborn).⁴⁵

Dearborn, also known as Dearborn Academy, began in Chicago in 1850s.⁴⁶ When Bertha attended Dearborn it was located on Wabash Avenue, between Madison and Washington Streets.⁴⁷ As a grammar school, Dearborn educated young girls from the ages of seven to fourteen, but money and status could expand or reduce the age requirements.⁴⁸

Dearborn required its pupils to wear white uniforms with frilled caps. Bertha learned how to hem towels and to play the piano while at Dearborn.⁴⁹ The span between Bertha's years at Dearborn and her attendance at Georgetown Academy are unclear. Still, at the age of fifteen, Bertha left Chicago to attend the Georgetown Academy of the Visitation (Visitation) in the District of Columbia.⁵⁰

This two-year school was founded in 1799 as a finishing school for young women from the Georgetown area. However, by the early 1800s Visitation became a boarding

⁴⁵With an enrollment of more than 2000 girls, St. Xavier's, now known as Mother McAuley's Liberal Arts High School, is the largest private high school, male, female, or coeducational, in the United States.

⁴⁶"Old Dearborn Seminary," *Daily News* 18 January 1889: 1-3.

⁴⁷"Old Dearborn Seminary, 1.

⁴⁸Telephone interview with Sister Joy Clough, October 7, 1997.

⁴⁹Ross, 29.

⁵⁰*Catalogue of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy of the Visitation, B.V.M., for the Academic Year 1865-1866* (Georgetown, D.C.: Courier Print, 1866) 4.

school for young women from around the United States. Although the school was run by Catholic nuns and priests, students from all denominations were welcome. Classes at Visitation began the first Monday in September and ended the first week of July. In 1865, according to the list of students, Bertha Honoré was only one of two students, in a class of 207 young girls, to attend Visitation from Illinois.

The Honorés paid approximately \$475 a year for Bertha to attend Visitation. According to the list of fees, cost varied depending upon the courses taken, and Bertha took almost every academic course, plus classes in piano, harp, and vocal music. In addition to the fees, Bertha had to bring at least six complete changes of clothes, including appropriate winter clothes, as a part of the required items needed by boarding students. Uniforms, consisting of at least one white and two black alpaca dresses with white aprons, were required of all students.⁵¹ Bertha was also required to bring, “two knives and forks, (silver forks are preferred) two silver spoons, a silver tumbler and four table napkins.”⁵² At Visitation, Bertha was remembered by friends as independent and “aloof rather than demonstrative in manner.”⁵³ Knowing the few female friends Bertha had throughout her life, this description is accurate. As later descriptions of Bertha noted, she was rather quiet, did not care to idly gossip, and was more inclined to listen than talk. The many honors she won during her first year at Visitation demonstrated that Bertha took her education seriously and was a dedicated student.

⁵¹*Catalogue of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy, 1865, 4.*

⁵²*Catalogue of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy, 1865, 6.*

⁵³Ross, 25.

In the July honors program Bertha sang "Crociato in Egitto" with nine other girls in the chorus, to entertain parents and friends.⁵⁴ She also took second premium awards for her work in Sacred and Profane History, Ancient and Modern Geography, and Mythology.⁵⁵ Bertha won first premium awards in Chemistry, Philosophy, Botany, and Astronomy.⁵⁶ For her vocal talents, Bertha won a third premium and received an award for her Mantua work, which was a class in sewing.⁵⁷ Bertha returned to Chicago for her summer break, but less than eight weeks later she returned for her last year at Georgetown.

Two-hundred and ten girls attended Visitation in the fall of 1866.⁵⁸ Bertha distinguished herself at graduation ceremonies the following July. As parents and friends watched, Bertha sang in the chorus again.⁵⁹ Bertha won first premiums for her work in Sacred and Profane History, Ancient and Modern Geography, Chemistry, Philosophy, Meteorology, Astronomy, sewing, and Botany.⁶⁰ Bertha also took top honors in Domestic Economy, and honors in French, piano, harp, and vocal music.⁶¹ Bertha was

⁵⁴*Catalogue*, 1865, 13.

⁵⁵*Catalogue*, 1865, 16.

⁵⁶*Catalogue*, 1865, 21.

⁵⁷*Catalogue*, 1865, 32.

⁵⁸*Catalogue of Pupils of the Georgetown Academy of the Visitation, B.V.M., for the Academic Year 1866-67* (Georgetown: Courier Print, 1867) 3.

⁵⁹*Catalogue*, 1866, 13.

⁶⁰*Catalogue*, 1866, 16.

⁶¹*Catalogue*, 1866, 27, 29, 32.

one of six girls who graduated in 1867 with the highest honors as a senior, which consisted of a Crown and Gold Medal, for uniform excellence of conduct.⁶² Eighteen-year-old Bertha Honoré returned to Chicago a poised and articulate young lady, well prepared to face what the future held for her.

While Bertha was at school in Georgetown, her parents moved from their Ashland Street home to the more fashionable Michigan Avenue area. In the summer of 1867 the Honorés presented Bertha to Chicago society. Later that year, with renewed health, Potter returned to Chicago to expand his growing real estate business. Building more than thirty buildings on State Street, Potter changed the location and appearance of Chicago's business district, ensuring his future and the future of State Street.⁶³ In 1868, on the southeast corner of State and Monroe streets, Palmer also began construction of his first Palmer House Hotel.⁶⁴ Palmer was financially secure and the only thing missing his life was someone to share it with, someone he had chosen years before.

Potter saw Bertha upon his return to Chicago and he knew that his feelings for her had only grown. He saw that she possessed every quality he wanted, and needed, in a wife. Determined to make Bertha his wife, Potter made his intentions concerning their daughter clear to the Honorés. While the Honorés supported Potter's decision with pleasure and excitement, Bertha was not as receptive to his intentions as her parents

⁶²*Catalogue*, 1866, 15.

⁶³Ross, 10.

⁶⁴Herman Kogan and Lloyd Wendt, *The Great Fire, Chicago, 1871* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1971) 25.

were.

Bertha, only eighteen-years-old, still viewed Potter as one of her father's older business associates. Well-known in Chicago as a beautiful, and wealthy young woman, Bertha had no intentions of going directly from her father's house to a husband's house, without enjoying herself first.

In 1868 Bertha was not ready to settle down, but she had noticed a change in Potter since his return from Europe.⁶⁵ While in Europe, Potter began taking an interest in his physical appearance. Enjoying the money he made, Potter returned to Chicago a well-dressed, healthier, and younger looking man. For the next few years Bertha and Potter dated each other and others. Bertha was very independent and could not be pressured into a marriage. Although Potter was a powerful and rich man, Bertha was determined that her marriage would be one formed out of love, not simply a union to cement a merger of two of Chicago's real estate giants. Finally, in 1870, two years after he first expressed his desire to marry her, Bertha agreed to marry Potter.⁶⁶

Bertha was twenty-one years old when she agreed to marry forty-three-year-old Potter Palmer. After their engagement became known, an article appeared in the July 24, 1870, edition of the *Chicago Sunday Times*. The article reported, not just the beauty Bertha possessed, but her intelligence as well. The article described Bertha Honoré as:

A southern type-medium height, clear, olive complexion, dark brown, eyes and hair, prone to *embonpoint* which will one day be matronly, with a beautiful neck and arms, and withal a luxuriant indolence of manner and

⁶⁵See illustrations for pictures of Potter Palmer. *Harold Exoner* 10 Feb. 1922

⁶⁶Ross, 29.

perfect repose of features that are at once comfortable and attractive. . . . She has a great deal of culture, and her natural refinement of manner combined with her rare attractions of face and figure, has secured a general admiration. . . . Miss Honoré is reserved in conversation, and, in society where young ladies talk so much, she doesn't always get credit for the intellectuality she really possesses. She dresses very elegantly. . . . and when she appears *en train*, she looks much taller than she really is--sort of a stately dahlia in society.⁶⁷

Throughout her life Bertha listened before speaking, deplored gossip, and wasted few words. While Bertha enjoyed being described by words such as beautiful and gracious, recognition as an intelligent woman, with interesting and intellectual thoughts and ideas, was just as important.⁶⁸

It was only when a society column leaked the news that Potter had reserved the bridal suite of his nearly-finished hotel for himself, that his wedding plans became known. Rumors flew as the engagement of Bertha Honoré and Potter Palmer became public knowledge. Some reported that Bertha agreed to marry Potter because her father was deeply in debt to him. Others simply stated that Bertha realized that Potter could do the most to advance her social goals. Finally, a *Chicago Tribune* report said:

. . . . It is stated that the bridegroom, when going away recently, offered to settle a million dollars on his intended bride but she nobly and persistently refused. This may put an end to the bitter observations of envious or cynical persons inclined to stamp the marriage contract--so momentous to the high contracting parties--as a commercial transaction. No matter who married Mr. Palmer the same cruel and unjust remarks would be made.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Elizabeth Jachimowicz, *Eight Chicago Women and Their Fashions 1860-1929* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1978) 19.

⁶⁸Harrison, Mrs. Carter, "Mrs. Potter Palmer." *Herald-Examiner* 19 Feb. 1922.

⁶⁹Ross, 31.

In a small ceremony attended by forty guests in her parents' home, Bertha Matilda Honoré became the wife of Potter Palmer on August 10, 1871.⁷⁰ After the wedding the Honorés held a lavish reception for seven-hundred at the posh Kinsley Restaurant on Adams Street.⁷¹ An article in the *Chicago Tribune* provided an account of the Palmer wedding and described the clothes worn by bride and groom and the lavish reception that followed. The article described Bertha's dress as "a white satin gown, shrouded in point lace," made in Paris especially for the occasion. Orange blossoms surrounded the shoulders of Bertha's dress and a crown of blossoms topped her long dark hair.⁷² In the same article Potter was described as, "six feet high, slight but well-made, and as straight as a poplar. The eyes are sort of hazel, with a glimmer of fun in their sharp, scrutinizing glance."⁷³

Potter decided to take Bertha on a month long trip to Europe instead of spending their honeymoon in a hotel room surrounded by construction workers. Bertha returned from her first trip to Europe laden with jewels, gowns, and many expensive art objects. As a wedding gift, Bertha also received the Palmer House Hotel from her husband. However, the Palmers would never live in their new hotel.

The summer of 1871 had been particularly dry in Chicago and less than two

⁷⁰This date is given by Emmet Dedmon in his book *Fabulous Chicago*. However, various sources have conflicting dates for the wedding of Bertha and Potter Palmer. Some sources have August 1870, others have July 29, 1871, and still others August 11, 1871.

⁷¹Witter, 19.

⁷²Emmet Dedmon, *Fabulous Chicago* (New York: Random House, 1953) 125.

⁷³Jachimowicz, 19.

inches of rain had fallen between July 4 and October 8.⁷⁴ On October 8, 1871, Potter was attending the funeral of a sister in New York. Bertha was packing for the move from Potter's country home, on the outskirts of the city, to their new apartment in the Palmer House Hotel. The hotel had officially opened September 26, 1871, just sixteen days earlier and Bertha was happy to be moving back into town.⁷⁵ Late that evening, Bertha saw an orange glow growing across the city in the distance. Unbeknownst to her, flames were fast approaching her new home and twenty-four hours later most of the Palmer and Honoré fortunes had gone up in smoke, in the great Chicago fire. The Palmers' just completed hotel burned to the ground, as did seventeen thousand other buildings.

The Chicago fire caused the death of three-hundred people, left more than 100,000 people homeless, and caused the destruction of more than \$200,000,000 in property.⁷⁶ While in New York, Potter heard the news of the fire and sent a message to his wife stating, "I have the particulars of the fire. Am perfectly reconciled to our losses. Be cheerful and do all possible for sufferers."⁷⁷

Before receiving Potter's telegram, Bertha opened her home to her family and to complete strangers. She fed women and children and found clothing and shelter for as many people as she could. Potter returned to Chicago and discovered that the fire

⁷⁴Joseph Kirkland, *The Story of Chicago* (Chicago: Dibble Publishing Company, 1892) 288.

⁷⁵McKenna, 27.

⁷⁶Kogan and Wendt, *The Great Chicago Fire*, 109.

⁷⁷Wendt and Kogan, *Give the Lady*, 128.

destroyed all but 5 percent of his buildings. Potter and his friend Cyrus H. McCormick, distressed at their losses, discussed leaving Chicago. According to historian Ishbel Ross, Bertha was upset that anyone, but particularly her husband, could consider leaving their home and the city she loved so much. Bertha told her husband, "Mr. Palmer, it's the duty of every Chicagoan to stay here and help rebuild this stricken city."⁷⁸

The Palmers stayed and began rebuilding immediately, as did most of Chicago's businessmen. Even in their own time of distress the Palmers, and other noted Chicago entrepreneurs, contributed to many fire relief funds established to aid the less fortunate. The Relief and Aid Society, of which Potter was a member, built 5,226 small houses between October 18 and November 11, 1871.⁷⁹ Within three months another relief agency, The Odd-Fellows organization, had received more than \$100,000 to help those who lost their possessions in the fire.⁸⁰ In one year over \$41,000,000 had been spent rebuilding the burned out district of Chicago.⁸¹ First on Potter's list was to rebuild a bigger, and more impressive, Palmer House Hotel for his wife.⁸²

In 1873 the Palmers moved into their deluxe apartment in their new hotel.⁸³ On

⁷⁸Ross, 7.

⁷⁹Joseph Kirkland, *The Story of Chicago*, 324.

⁸⁰*Odd-Fellows Chicago Relief Auditing Report* (Chicago: Independent order of Off-Fellows, 1872) 9.

⁸¹Skip Wilson, *Illinois 100 Years Ago* (Albuquerque: Sun Publishing Company, 1976) 13.

⁸²Ross, 8.

⁸³See illustrations for a picture of the second Palmer House Hotel.

February 1, 1874, Bertha and Potter had their first child, a son, Honoré. In the fall of 1874, young Honoré, as well as his parents, received vast media coverage at the wedding of his Aunt to the son of President Ulysses S. Grant.

Why the Honorés agreed to let Bertha and Potter host Ida's wedding is never explained. While it seems that throughout her life, Bertha had a knack for accomplishing many goals with a single act of kindness, it would be naive to think that she did not understand the social implications of hosting the wedding of the President's son. Despite a lack of information explaining Bertha's motives for hosting the Grant and Honoré wedding, it was a shrewd decision by the Palmers, as the Palmer House Hotel also received nation wide coverage as the place where the presidential party would stay.

The Palmers spared no expense for Ida's wedding, which was held at the Honoré home on October 20, 1874. President Grant, his family, and the many dignitaries attending the wedding, stayed at the Palmer House Hotel. Bertha wanted everything to be perfect for the wedding and to show Chicago in its best light.

Newspaper accounts included who did and did not attend the wedding. The newspapers included the fact that the Palmers provided a complete set of silver for the wedding, consisting of everything from the vases to the dinnerware. The wedding dinner menu consisted of scalloped oysters, turkey, snipe, chicken and lobster salads, ices, fruits, cake, and an abundance of champagnes and wines.⁸⁴

The press coverage of Ida's wedding also included detailed descriptions of the

⁸⁴Linda Williams, *A Taste of History: Historic Spanish Point Cooking Then and Now* (Memphis: Whimmer, 1993) 52.

bride's wedding dress and trousseau. Ida's dress was described as "a Paris gown of lace and supple white d'orange and underneath was a corset of the same satin, made to order with one hundred whalebones in it."⁸⁵ Various newspapers wrote that Ida also wore six petticoats ranging in material from satin to flannel under her wedding dress.⁸⁶

Newspapers also printed information that described additional undergarments in Ida's trousseau. Undergarments of Ida's listed in newspapers included "a dozen corsets, including one made of lavender silk with 'matching underwear' and endless pairs of stockings classified as opera, carriage, reception, morning, and evening."⁸⁷

The outfits that Bertha and Potter wore also received newspaper coverage, as did the outfit their eight-month-old son, Honoré, wore.⁸⁸ Bertha was dressed in a gray gown that flared at the bottom, with a fringe of cardinal red. To complete her outfit, Bertha wore a collection of diamonds and pearls, and had pink tea roses in her hair. Potter's gray tailored suit, with a matching gray topper, complimented his wife's outfit. Young Honoré, only eight months old, was carried into the ceremony by his nurse on a satin pillow. Honoré's handmade satin dress was over three-yards long and matched the pillow on which he was carried.⁸⁹ According to a *Chicago Sunday Herald* article, dated March 24, 1940, the Palmers' gift to Ida was \$10,000 worth of diamonds to wear on her

⁸⁵Stephen Longstreet, *Chicago: 1860-1919* (New York: David McKay, 1973) 141.

⁸⁶Dedmon, 126.

⁸⁷Dedmon, 126.

⁸⁸Ross, 34.

⁸⁹Dedmon, 126.

wedding day.⁹⁰

After the wedding, whenever he traveled near Chicago, President Grant stayed at the Palmer House Hotel. Likewise, Bertha became a frequent White House visitor. The Grant and Honoré wedding firmly entrenched Bertha Palmer as the *grand dame* of Chicago's society.

Bertha and Potter's second, and last child, Potter II, was born October 20, 1875. While the Palmer House was an elegant hotel, raising two growing boys in such a hectic atmosphere became difficult for the Palmers.⁹¹ The Palmers decided that a home would be a better place to raise their children than the crowded halls of their hotel. Potter also wanted to give Bertha a more suitable place to entertain her guests. Potter Palmer, with architects Henry Ives Cobb and Charles S. Frost, created an unusual structure that many called "the castle" because of the turrets used in the design.⁹² The Palmer home, called everything from an abomination to delightful, came complete with an eighty-foot tower.

The building of the Palmer home, described by various sources as possessing the styles of early English battlement, Gothic, Rhenish, and Norman Gothic, continued for three years, from 1882-1885. In a move some have described as pompous, and others described as calculated because of Potter's concern for the safety of his family, he did

⁹⁰*Chicago Sunday Herald* March 24, 1940. Part two of five parts. Page 7.

⁹¹Although specific information about childcare arrangement for the Palmer children are unknown during their stay in the Palmer House Hotel, it is assumed that both children had nannies and servants as they did when they moved into their home.

⁹²See illustrations four, five, six, and seven, for pictures of the Palmer home.

copies of those found in a palace in Cairo.⁹⁶ Bertha's ten foot high bed was a Louis XVI museum piece, lavishly adorned with matching white and gold satin bedding.⁹⁷ Bertha received friends in her drawing room, called the White room because of its white decorations, which was adjacent to her large dressing room.⁹⁸ Completing her bedroom suite was a bathroom containing a swan shaped sunken tub and a mother-of-pearl basin.⁹⁹ The rest of the Palmer home was just as unique as Bertha's bedroom.

Bertha created different atmospheres for each room in her home. Most of the woodwork in the home was hand carved and the grand spiral staircase, made of carved oak with posts, contained the Honoré coat of arms. Marble mosaic floors and granite and onyx fireplaces were found throughout the home. The Palmers greeted their guests in the Louis XVI drawing room, or in the Greek, Japanese, or Turkish parlors. The octagon entry rose more than thirty feet and expensive tapestries covered the walls. The Palmer home had an English dining room that sat fifty comfortably, a Spanish music room, a Turkish parlor, and for Bertha's use there was a Flemish Renaissance library. A large, glassed-in greenhouse provided Bertha's castle with fresh flowers year-round. Bertha's favorite flower, the American Beauty red rose, was usually found throughout her

⁹⁶Dedmon, 128.

⁹⁷Ross, 45. 128-134

⁹⁸Pierce, vol.3, 167. and Katherine C. 2004, vol. Master Paintings in the Art Institute of Chicago (New York: Graphic Society Press) 8

⁹⁹Finis Farr, *Chicago: A Personal History of America's Most Famous City* (New York: Arlington House, 1973) 12. Dedmon, 127

home.¹⁰⁰ A visit to the Palmer home was not complete without viewing Bertha's vast collection of Barbizon and French Impressionist art.

Even without her role as the President of the BLM of the 1893 Exposition, Bertha Palmer is recognized in art circles as the woman who brought Impressionist art to Chicago and the United States. Bertha began collecting art in 1888, but she purchased most of her Impressionist art collection during the two trips to Europe she took in conjunction with the WCE.¹⁰¹

Few people of the time understood Degas, Monet, Cassatt, or Renoir, but Bertha saw something in these paintings that Americans would come to appreciate later. Bertha did not support any cause, person, or artists, without careful research. After viewing a few pieces of this new art, Bertha read everything available on impressionism and the artists who painted such pictures. She understood the features that made the particular impressionists' paintings masterpieces and personally visited Monet, Degas, and Renoir. Bertha understood enough about impressionist art that she gave lectures about it at the Art Institute.¹⁰²

Bertha Palmer gave a lecture on a subject only when she felt she knew more than the audience she was addressing. Her ideas about art were explained in a lecture she gave at the Art Institute. Bertha explained her theory of art in the following manners:

¹⁰⁰Dedmon, 128-134.

¹⁰¹James N. Wood and Katherine C. Lee, eds. *Master Paintings in the Art Institute of Chicago* (New York: Graphic Society Books) 8.

¹⁰²Maddox, 24 and Dedmon, 127.

"You women know how it is, the more you put on, sometimes, the worse you look, and the more you take off, the better you look."¹⁰³ While interjecting such a provocative sentiment might normally have shocked some of the women in attendance because Bertha Palmer said it, the women gave her a rousing ovation. According to historian Emmett Dedmon, Bertha received this response because people were "concerned not so much about what she thinks as they are about her aloof manner, her stunning carriage, the smooth pink and white unwrinkled skin, the perfect teeth, wonderful hair, velvet gowns, her famous furs and the sumptuous way in which she conducts her own ménage."¹⁰⁴

Bertha's first purchase of Impressionist art was a Degas entitled, *On the Stage*, that she bought in 1889 for \$500. It was through her friend, and French art liaison, Sarah Hallowell, that Bertha met Mary Cassatt, an American French Impressionist painter living in Paris. It was through Cassatt, a protégée and friend of Degas, that Bertha first learned of Degas' paintings.¹⁰⁵ Bertha eventually purchased more than seventy Impressionist paintings. While other types of art were displayed in the Palmers' home, including works by American artists such as James McNeil Whistler and George Inness, the bulk of their collection was painted by impressionist artists.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Dedmon, 126.

¹⁰⁴Dedmon, 126.

¹⁰⁵Mary Cassatt would also paint one of the large murals that was displayed in the Woman's Building during the Exposition.

¹⁰⁶Alexis Gregory, *Families of Fortune: Life in the Gilded Age* (New York: Rizzoli International Publication, 1993) 158.

The Palmer art hung on the red-velvet walls of the massive ballroom and picture gallery in their home. Bertha bought several Delacroixs, Pissaros, Corots, and Sisleys, and displayed them grouped by artist and style, but the bulk of her collection consisted of Monets, of which she had thirty-one.¹⁰⁷ Bertha, however wanted to share her art collection with the whole world during the 1893 WCE.

Impressionist art during the late nineteenth century was considered controversial at best. French art critics generally turned their backs on this new art. In the official French art collection sent to the Exposition they included only one Impressionist painting. Despite strong opposition from French and American art officials, to such art, Palmer convinced the French to display fifteen of her favorite Impressionist paintings in the Palace of Fine Arts.¹⁰⁸ After Bertha gave her approval, and support, to this new type of art, the Impressionist exhibit became one of the most popular sights in the Palace of Fine Arts at the Exposition.¹⁰⁹

During the 1870s Bertha spent much of her time raising her two sons and tending to their needs.¹¹⁰ Bertha was an attentive mother and a busy wife.¹¹¹ Although she actively participated in her husband's and her father's real estate businesses, she did not

¹⁰⁷Ross, 157.

¹⁰⁸The Fine Arts Palace was the only permanent building of the 1893 Exposition. In 1921 it became the Field Museum and today is the famous Museum of Science and Industry.

¹⁰⁹Ross, 134.

¹¹⁰Witter, 29.

¹¹¹Mattox, 26.

neglect her children or her domestic obligations. Bertha was an authoritative mother and did not indulge her sons. She insisted that they be considerate of others, respect their elders, that they finish what they start, and that they study hard.¹¹² Bertha worried about the physical conditions of her sons, as well as their educational needs. Young Potter was a fragile child, so Bertha planned a rigorous program of physical training and sports activities for both of her sons.¹¹³ Bertha also enjoyed reading to her sons and talked to them each night about their day. However, as much as Bertha loved her sons, she missed having a little girl to talk to and dress up. One year after Potter II was born, her sister, Ida, gave birth to a daughter and Bertha raised her as the daughter she would never have.

Julia Grant, the only daughter of Frederick and Ida Grant, was born in 1876.¹¹⁴ Julia spent more time with her Aunt and Uncle than with her parents due to Frederick's military career and the Grants' uncertain economic conditions.¹¹⁵ Ida knew that under Bertha's care, Julia would not lack for attention, travel, and other financial considerations that she could not provide for her daughter.¹¹⁶ Ida, according to Julia, was grateful that her sister had such an important role in her daughter's life.¹¹⁷

¹¹²Ross, 50.

¹¹³Ross, 51.

¹¹⁴Frederick, a soldier under General Custer's command, stayed for Julia's birth in June of 1876, which prevented him from becoming a statistic at the Custer massacre.

¹¹⁵Princess Julia Spéransky Cantacuzène, NÉE Grant, *My Life Here and There* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1921) 56.

¹¹⁶Princess Julia Spéransky Cantacuzène, NÉE Grant, *My Life Here and There*, 177.

¹¹⁷Cantacuzène, 181.

As soon as Bertha was comfortable leaving her children for extended periods, she became active in the social clubs of Chicago including the Fortnightly and the Friday Clubs.¹¹⁸ According to membership lists of the Fortnightly Club, the first club Bertha joined, Bertha officially joined in 1880. When the scope of the needs of the social clubs grew, Bertha joined civic organizations including the CWC and the Civic Federation. Bertha's membership in the civic organizations, in a small way compensated for her inability to run for political office. In 1890, when Bertha was elected as the President of the BLM, her talents as a politician, ambassador, and leader, were displayed for the world to see.

For nearly four years Bertha planned, worked, and fought, to make sure that, for the first time in history, women's participation in a world's fair would be anything but honorary. The Woman's Building, completely designed, adorned, and run by women, was a grand success. When the Fair ended, Bertha could have taken a well-deserved rest, but instead, she continued her work with the Civic Federation and masterminded political campaigns for her husband and her son.

In 1896, Bertha began a campaign to have Potter appointed successor to Theodore Runyon as the United States Ambassador to Berlin. Although Potter cared about who might be running for office, and who might win, he made it clear twenty years earlier that he had no desire to be involved in politics. When President Grant offered Potter a Cabinet post in his second administration in 1876, Palmer politely, but firmly,

¹¹⁸When Bertha Palmer joined the Fortnightly Club, her sons were five and six years of age.

declined.¹¹⁹ Still, Bertha suggested to vice-president Adlai Stevenson that he nominate Potter for the office. Regardless of what Potter wanted, the whole Berlin campaign appeared to be Bertha's brainchild and she pulled out all the stops to have him elected.

In the Chicago Historical Society (CHS) there are dozens of telegrams and letters, Bertha sent, and received, from influential people. Bertha sent correspondence to any prominent person that she could think of, including governors, lawyers, businessmen, judges, and current and past senators. Bertha kept detailed lists of those influential individuals she could absolutely count on and another that contained the names of those who had already sent "strong letters" in support of Potter to Washington.¹²⁰ Few people believed that a Midwesterner would receive such an appointment over a New Englander. Even as hopes for the appointment of her husband grew dim, Bertha kept up her campaign.

Some people felt that an appointment for Potter was simply a means for Bertha to move to the next rung on the social ladder. A telegram from Senator Daniel F. Voorhees to the White House said, "Palmer and his admirable lady would give distinction to such a position abroad."¹²¹ In another telegram, United States Attorney John H. Black also suggested that while appointing a prominent man like Potter would be beneficial, his

¹¹⁹Ross, 47.

¹²⁰Private papers of Mrs. Potter Palmer, CHS. White House, January 6, 1896. Private

¹²¹Senator Daniel W. Voorhees to the White House, February 2, 1896. Private Papers of Bertha Palmer, CHS.

beautiful and well-known wife would complete the package.¹²² Bertha Palmer wanted her husband appointed so much that she had created a form letter for influential people to sign and send to Washington.

A copy of this form letter was found in the file of Bertha Palmer's Personal Papers, dated January 30, 1896, in the CHS. In the letter Potter's qualifications were stated and the letter was supposed to be signed by John R. Walsh of the Chicago National Bank. Yet, in her distinctive handwriting Bertha had mistakenly signed her own name. At the bottom of the letter, Bertha crossed her name and signed the name of John R. Walsh.

Despite Bertha's overzealous attempts, Potter did not receive the appointment. Edwin Uhl, Runyon's assistant, received the appointment instead. For perhaps the first time in her life, Bertha had failed to achieve something she really wanted. However, in 1900 she began another campaign for her eldest son.

In 1900, when her son Honoré was twenty-six, Bertha encouraged him to run for political office. Like his father, Honoré had no political ambitions.¹²³ However, Bertha felt that if her husband would not be involved in politics, and she could not, then her son would. If successful, Honoré's run for office would serve to fulfill Bertha's unattainable political ambitions and continue her work to help the city of Chicago.

When the position of alderman opened in the twenty-first ward, to please his

¹²²United States Attorney John H. Black to the White House, January 6, 1896. Private Papers of Bertha Palmer, CHS.

¹²³Longstreet, 120.

mother, Honoré announced his candidacy for the office. Under the guidance of his mother, who was his political manager, Honoré practiced the discipline and methodical plans of action that he had seen his mother use. Like his mother, once he decided to do something Honoré gave all he had to accomplish his goals.

Honoré studied Italian so he could address the non-English speaking Italians in his ward. To the Germans, he spoke German, and he spoke passable French to the French in his district.¹²⁴ When Honoré was gaining in popularity, his opponent, Fletcher Dobyns, began a rumor, as a joke, that Honoré had joined the waiter's union at his father's hotel. Bertha, hearing the rumor, sent Honoré down to the Palmer House where he donned a waiter's uniform and had his picture taken for the newspaper. He then announced that he was proud to wear the uniform of so honorable a profession.¹²⁵ Bertha Palmer was the greatest asset her son had, and she did all she could for Honoré's campaign, as she had for Potter's, to make sure he won the election.

Bertha appeared at Honoré's meetings, gave interviews about the state of Chicago and held teas for workers. The climax of the campaign was the reception given by Bertha for her son, the ward workers, and anyone who supported Honoré's campaign. Bertha opened her home to over four-hundred dishwashers, waiters, political workers, and voters in the ward. Dressed in her one of her finest gowns, and adorned with a collection of diamonds, Bertha shook the rough, red hands of every worker that entered

¹²⁴Wendt, 130.

¹²⁵Ross, 179.

her home.¹²⁶ People who might never have met Bertha Palmer, let alone enter her home, had been welcomed into Bertha's home as graciously as the influential and powerful people she usually entertained. With Bertha's direction and help, Honoré easily won the election. Honoré was elected twice and did nothing to disgrace his mother. His brother, Potter, however was not as pleased with Honoré's reform ideas.

Like his mother, Honoré worked for the general good of the public, overlooking his own interest. One of Honoré's first acts as alderman was to get an ordinance passed that required all automobiles to be registered. Although the *Chicago Automobile Club* opposed Honoré's ordinance, he worked hard to get it passed. Honoré also happened to be the president of the automobile club. One of the first citizens of Chicago ticketed for not having a proper number was Honoré's brother, Potter.¹²⁷

Despite the fact that Bertha did not hold a political office, she did represent the United States in an official capacity once again, at another world's fair. In 1900 Bertha Palmer was the only woman appointed by President McKinley as member of the National Commission representing the United States at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Bertha took Paris by storm, just as Jacqueline Kennedy did in 1961. While Bertha did not have the power she possessed in the 1893 Exposition, she still captivated the French people and managed to make her presence known to all.

Before leaving for Paris, Palmer managed to have her good friend Jane Addams appointed to a position on the panel of the Department of Philanthropy, an appointment

¹²⁶Longstreet, 143.

¹²⁷Ross, 181.

the French directors had initially opposed.¹²⁸ Just as she had in 1893, Bertha also succeeded in placing women on important committees, such as the award juries. Remembered by many as the official hostess of the 1893 Exposition, Palmer fulfilled her current position with her customary grace.

Their trip to Paris in 1900 was the last trip that the Palmers took together. On May 4, 1902, in the year that marked his fiftieth year in Chicago, Potter Palmer died at the age of seventy-six. Potter was buried in Graceland Cemetery in Chicago. Besides Potter and Bertha, there are eight other family members buried at Graceland.¹²⁹ Other famous Chicagoans buried in Graceland Cemetery include the families of the Henry Honorés, the George Pullmans, the Marshall Fields, and Daniel Burnham.¹³⁰

For thirty-two years Potter made sure that Bertha's every desire was met. Even after his death, Potter had made sure that his beloved wife, would be taken care of financially. Potter's will gave Bertha total control of his eight million dollar estate.¹³¹ Well-meaning friends, and even Potter's attorney, tried to dissuade Potter from leaving such a fortune in the hands, and control, of a "woman." In drawing up his will, Potter's attorney pointed out that Bertha might marry after he died. "If she does, he'll need the

¹²⁸Weiman, 594.

¹²⁹Burial information received from Graceland Cemetery.

¹³⁰Barbara Lanctot, *A Walk Through Graceland Cemetery* (Chicago: Chicago Architecture Foundation, 1988.)

¹³¹Ross 182-183.

money," Palmer responded.¹³² When Potter's friend, Marshall Field discovered Bertha's inheritance he told Ernest Poole, "a million dollars is enough for any woman."¹³³

Bertha lived a very full and exciting life, but her world revolved around her husband and her family. After Potter's death, Bertha traveled extensively to escape the pain that Chicago now held for her. While Bertha Palmer had many acquaintances and people she called her friends, her position as the head of Chicago's society also seemed to prevent her from establishing close relationships with people outside of her family. In her later years she remarked several times how lonely she was, particularly when her children were grown. In a conversation with a friend, Bertha spoke about the loneliness she felt when she returned to Chicago, the changes occurring in the city, and the emptiness she felt. Bertha said:

I am so lonely and without family. It's a terrible thing for a woman when her children grow up and no longer need her. And that is what happened to me long ago. Boys outgrow their mother before girls do. When I had Julia I didn't mind so much; but after she married and went to Russia to live, I was and always have been terribly lonely. That is why I have gone about socially so much. It helps one to forget.¹³⁴

For nearly eight years Bertha spent most of her time in England or Paris. When questioned why she returned to Chicago for only short periods, she responded:

There is more leisure abroad and more time for a woman in such a position as mine. I go over there and make friends, first of all, I suppose, because the people of England and France are charming, but more particularly, I think, because one must have friends who move somewhat

¹³²Ross, 183.

¹³³Poole, 127.

¹³⁴Maddox, 24.

in the same time and the spirit in which we ourselves move. And the Chicago of today is really a bit too energetic for me--too energetic and over-weighted with memories.¹³⁵

However, in 1910 Bertha did return to Chicago and while reading the local newspaper she discovered an advertisement that gave her life a new meaning and direction.

An advertisement for land in the little known place called, Sarasota, Florida caught Bertha's eye. After exploring the area Bertha bought more than 140,000 acres of undeveloped land in Florida. For a woman who was known worldwide for her social position, it was in Florida that Bertha found something that she was proud of, and that she enjoyed doing. Her position as the President of the BLM, her grand parties in which she entertained authors, social leaders, presidents of the United States, and her worldwide travels, did not seem to bring the same pleasure to Bertha as the gardens on her Florida property that she called, The Oaks. Of course times had changed, and what was important to Bertha years earlier had also changed. In an interview Bertha gave in Chicago in 1915, Bertha said:

The most wonderful thing in the world is a garden. I have found my one talent, if I have any, at Sarasota Bay. It is to watch beautiful things grow and see flowers blossom as I plant them. . . . I have designed the greater part of my Florida estate myself.¹³⁶

For a woman like Bertha Palmer, who dined with kings and queens, the simple things in life like gardening, family, and grandchildren, had become the most important. Bertha eventually had nine grandchildren, including Julia's three children, whom she considered

¹³⁵Maddox, 22.

¹³⁶Williams, 64.

as much her grandchildren as her sons' children. After Potter died, Bertha was truly happy when Potter II, Honoré, and Julia could travel with her. Her favorite times were those that she spent with her children and grandchildren in Chicago and Florida.

Bertha Palmer's social position and class gave her the opportunity and time to work for the betterment of Chicago and its citizens. However, it was her personal desires and beliefs that gave her the endless energy to complete her goals, particularly those regarding the 1893 Exposition.

Although women had participated in the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Fair, their participation was minimal compared to the plans Bertha Palmer had for women in 1893.¹⁰⁷ Under Bertha's direction, what began as a dream for a single, separate woman's building, turned into an international awareness of the work and plight of women. By the time Bertha Palmer was done, the Lady Manager had built a large woman's building, a separate children's building, and a woman's dormitory to provide a safe residence for the single women attending the Exposition.

On September 19, 1890, George Davis was appointed the Temporary Director of the Exposition. Within weeks, the all male World's Columbian Commission began appointing women to a Board of Lady Managers (BLM). The Commission viewed these appointments only as a concession to women.¹⁰⁸ The men did not really expect women to participate actively in the Exposition, but to merely assume honorary positions. Once

¹⁰⁷Weiman, 1.

¹⁰⁸Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Nelson Hall, Chicago, 1979), 78.

Chapter Two: The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition

In December of 1889 Senator Bill Cullom of Illinois introduced the Exposition Bill in the United States Senate. In the same year, a group of Chicago's leading men, including Marshall Field and Potter Palmer, formed a plan to bring the Exposition to Chicago. The men wanted to show the world how far the city had come just eighteen-years after the fire. After a heated battle with New York, and seven ballots in the senate, President Benjamin Harrison signed a bill granting Chicago the right to hold the next world's fair.

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¹³⁷Weiman, 1.

¹³⁸Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Nelson Hall, Chicago, 1979). 78.

Bertha Palmer was elected as the president of the BLM however, the role of women in the Exposition would be anything but honorary. Bertha Palmer knew what direction she planned on taking for women during the Exposition. She wanted, expected, and proceeded to graciously demand, and receive concessions from the male commission.

Although she did not call herself a New Woman, Palmer was a model of the new woman emerging in America. In her book, *Disorderly Conduct*, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg defines the new woman as, "Confident and independent, a self-created urban expert," who "spearheaded bourgeois efforts to respond creatively to the new city and new economy."¹³⁹ Smith-Rosenberg continues that the New Woman began to demand equality for herself and other women in education, employment and in wages.

Throughout her life Bertha Palmer asserted her right to a "public voice, visible power, and laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded to bourgeois men," as Smith-Rosenberg wrote this New Woman would.¹⁴⁰ Although Smith-Rosenberg suggests that the new woman was "more likely to be single," as a married woman Bertha presented a variation of this new woman.¹⁴¹ The education Bertha received was more than the average female received during this period as the finishing school she attended in Washington was generally reserved for the young women who came from well-to-do families. It took every quality that a New Woman like Bertha Palmer possessed to

¹³⁹Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 175-177.

¹⁴⁰Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 176.

¹⁴¹Woloch, 269.

complete her goals for women's participation in the Exposition. First, Bertha would have to contend with her opponents on the Board of Lady Managers, many of whom also represented the New Woman.¹⁴²

In 1889 Susan B. Anthony learned about the United States Senate's plans to hold the 1893 World's Fair. Knowing that the women's suffrage movement was still unpopular, Anthony began working in the background to secure a place for women at the fair. Knowing that some women whose social prestige she needed to secure such a place for women might be frightened away if suffrage were mentioned, Anthony worked quietly under the auspices of the newly formed Queen Isabella Society, (QIS).

The QIS was founded in 1889.¹⁴³ Headquarters for the society were in the Chicago office of female ophthalmologist Dr. Francis Dickinson, a cousin of Susan B. Anthony, and a staunch feminist.¹⁴⁴ The women in this organization called themselves the QIS in honor of Queen Isabella of Castile. The members of the Society believed that Queen Isabella was really responsible for the discovery of America because without her financial support Columbus would have remained an obscure sailor.¹⁴⁵

The original purpose of QIS was twofold. Primarily members of the Society

¹⁴²See illustrations for a picture of Bertha Palmer as she assumed her role as the president of the Board of Lady Managers.

¹⁴³The Daughters of the Isabella's, a derivative of the Queen Isabella Society, is still an active organization today. Still comprised of working, and professional women, the Daughters of the Isabella's Indiana chapter held their annual meeting in Elkhart in April, 1997.

¹⁴⁴Weiman, 28.

¹⁴⁵Weiman, 48.

wanted to build a separate woman's building at the fair and to be recognized as the official women's organization of the Exposition. Secondly, the women of the QIS wanted to make sure that a statue of Queen Isabella was unveiled at the Exposition and stood in a prominent place of honor.¹⁴⁶

The powerful Chicago Woman's Club (CWC) had also developed an auxiliary committee to bring the fair to Chicago. The Woman's Auxiliary had set three goals for itself. Like the QIS, the Auxiliary wanted a separate woman's building. The Auxiliary also wanted a part of the Woman's Building devoted to the exhibition of the work of women in industry. Additionally, the women wanted audience rooms in the Woman's Building for international conventions dedicated to topics of interest to women. In the hopes of making the Woman's Building a reality, the members of the Auxiliary also agreed to have its members sell as many shares of Fair stock as possible.¹⁴⁷ Once the National Commission began to appoint members to the Board of Lady Managers in the summer of 1890 division and conflict between the two groups also began.

The Commission appointed women to the BLM in the same way that had governed their own appointments. Names were placed in nomination and only those women who nominated themselves, or those nominated by politicians and other prominent citizens, were considered. Although this process eliminated the women who were not well-known or well-to-do, from the list of nominees, the Commission chose two women from each state, each territory, and the District of Columbia. An additional eight

¹⁴⁶Farmer, 113.

¹⁴⁷Weiman, 27.

state level.¹⁵⁰ Bertha Palmer's goals aligned more with Anthony's NSWA, but it seems she never gave public support to any suffrage organization.

Bertha voiced her belief in equal work for equal pay and the education of women, but she did not have an equal rights agenda. Her work with the millinery workers and with the Chicago Woman's Club, was directly linked to general social reform. Bertha's priority was to create a place for women at the Exposition, where a true picture of the conditions they lived and worked in would be displayed. She wanted to ensure the full participation of women so they could compete with their male counterparts, display their art and talents, and find a place to speak to others about their fears, concerns, and interests.

Most of the women involved in the planning of the Woman's Building were delighted with the prospects of a separate building to display the work of women. Already well-known in Chicago, Bertha had the support of the majority of women on the Board.¹⁵¹ Yet, after Bertha's election, the QIS changed their minds about a separate building for women. Members of the QIS were upset that they did not have a larger number of women on the BLM. Since they realized they were not going to have as much control of the Board as they wanted, the Isabella members quickly began to plan their own agenda.

In the first of several reversals of their original desires, the QIS decided a separate

¹⁵⁰Woloch, 309-319 and Dubois, 19.

¹⁵¹According to records kept in the *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club*, eventually more than 400 Women's Club members were involved in the Exposition.

building for women was unnecessary. The Isabella members now felt that a separate woman's building would only continue to keep women in their "proper" places. The Society decided they wanted the ability to exhibit and compete with men in every aspect of the fair. In contrast, Bertha feared that if women competed with men for the limited space available in the other exhibition halls, they would be completely ignored.¹⁵²

After much discussion, Bertha felt the two groups had reached a compromise. The Board decided to continue their plans for a separate Woman's Building, but also decided that the Woman's Building would hold no competitive exhibits for women. Instead the Woman's Building would depict the progress of women over the centuries. Any woman who desired could, with the Board's help and support, compete with the male entrants. After reaching their decision, the Board announced, "Restricting women exhibitions to one building would have been a fatal blow, for awards received in competition only with the work of other women would have been of comparatively little actual commercial value."¹⁵³ Although Bertha Palmer would gain international acclaim as the Board's president, she would also have to deal with nasty gossip, innuendo, jealousy, and continual questions regarding many of her actions.

The QIS' began a public campaign to discredit the BLM and their actions. Trying to portray members of the Board as simple women of wealth, who were out of touch with the reality of the lives of most women, the QIS began a negative campaign against the BLM in the Chicago newspapers.

¹⁵²Hobbes, 2.

¹⁵³Farmer, 163.

Unknown members of the QIS', began placing articles in the local newspaper. The QIS first attack on the Board concerned the proposed separate building for women. An article in the *Chicago Evening Post* said, "A Woman's Building is utterly without warrant in a sound sense . . . it is a special building that only one visitor in every fifty thousand will care to visit."¹⁵⁴ When these attacks did not achieve the desired effect of making the Board appear unfit to the locals, personal attacks on certain members of the Board began. According to the world's fair historian, Jean Weiman, dissident members of the QIS, on the BLM, criticized Bertha at a Board meeting. One of Bertha's opponents said:

The trouble with the ladies who are in charge of the workings of the executive committee, can be stated in one point. Their instincts are to help women by being charitable to them instead of by giving them opportunities to work for what they want. Women who are wealthy society leaders, naturally incline that way. Women of the industrial or professional class would rather. . . furnish a grand display of the work and success of women that would help all who came to see it. . . .¹⁵⁵

Years before beginning her work on the BLM, Bertha a lifelong advocate of assistance for women and children, had also been a staunch supporter of the education of all women. While Bertha continued her work, members of the QIS on the BLM continued to create discord.

When their campaign failed to disrupt the Board's direction and goals, the QIS, changed their minds again and decided to go ahead with plans to build their own building at the Exposition. Bertha knew she had to do something to control the growing discord

¹⁵⁴Weiman, 55.

¹⁵⁵Weiman, 57.

between the two groups.

Bertha viewed the ability of women to organize and run a building, on their own, as a tremendous opportunity, one with which they should not squander. She feared that the highly publicized division between the Woman's Board and the QIS might cause the National Commission of men to take over all the plans the women had made, and cause more traditional women to boycott the fair completely. Bertha anticipated that the QIS would present an application for their own space at the Exposition, and moved quickly with her plans to gain total control.

In an autocratic move, Palmer presented a resolution to the main board of commissioners. She asked for, and received from the National Commission, permission for the BLM to approve all applications for "ground, pavilion, and other structures intended for the exclusive use or entertainment of women in the Exposition."¹⁵⁶ After Palmer received the control she wanted, and felt she needed to complete her job successfully, the QIS petitioned the National Commission again asking for their own space on the fair grounds. When the BLM prevailed, the Isabella Society decided if they could not build on the Exposition grounds, they would build their own building at a site near the fair.

Although a site had been picked for the proposed Queen Isabella's building away from the Exposition, and a plaster cast had been made of Queen Isabella, neither venture was completed. In a small concession to the QIS, and to honor Queen Isabella, the BLM received permission from the United States Mint to design a silver coin with the Queen's

¹⁵⁶Weiman, 61.

likeness stamped on it.

With the Board's approval, forty-thousand quarters were issued for the Exposition and sold for one dollar each.¹⁵⁷ Although the Board did not associate itself with the coin, they were still accountable for the location and sales of the coin. By 1895 they sold only 22,007 of the coins. The Board could explain the location of 2,003 quarters and felt that 100 coins were stolen. The women could not account for more than fifteen thousand coins, although some Board members assumed the coins had been remelted.¹⁵⁸ The Board explained that the coin could have been unpopular for many reasons. The National Commission also had a souvenir fifty-cent piece commissioned for the Exposition. The men's coin sold for its face value and most fair-goers could not see spending a dollar for a quarter souvenir. Other sources speculate that the association of the quarter with the QIS had contributed to its unpopularity. Although the Isabella coin proved to be the least successful venture for the Board, most of Bertha's decisions regarding the Woman's Building were innovative and astute.

Daniel Burnham, chief of construction for the Exposition's buildings, wanted noted architect Robert Hunt to build the Woman's Building, but Bertha had other ideas. After informing Burnham that she wanted a woman to design the Woman's Building, Palmer quickly drew a sketch of a building two hundred by five hundred feet.¹⁵⁹ When Burnham realized that Palmer's plan offered some major cost savings, he agreed to a

¹⁵⁷Weiman, 485.

¹⁵⁸Weiman, 486.

¹⁵⁹Weiman, 364.

contest in which women could submit their own plans for a woman's building based upon Bertha's sketch.¹⁶⁰

Thirteen women submitted designs, but twenty-one-year-old Sophia Hayden won the contest. Hayden, the first female to graduate from the four-year architectural program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was also the first woman to design a major building in the United States.¹⁶¹ Burnham recommended only a few structural changes to Hayden's original plans. The knowledge Sophia Hayden possessed, and her ease in working with the men, surprised the male architects.

Bertha made the largest change to Hayden's original plans for the Woman's Building, by adding a rooftop garden to the building.¹⁶² Architect Richard Hunt, in response to a request from Palmer, sent a letter to Hayden praising her for the design of the Woman's Building.¹⁶³ Bertha then informed the press of Hunt's letter of praise and noted that the Woman's Building, the last building of the Exposition to receive approval for construction, was the first building finished on the Exposition grounds.¹⁶⁴ Other than the work involved in the construction of the building, and the moving and positioning of heavy objects, the 200 by 400-foot neoclassical structure was entirely completed by

¹⁶⁰Hunt would have received \$10,000 plus traveling expenses. The winner of the woman's contest would win \$1000 plus expenses.

¹⁶¹Muccigrosso, 67.

¹⁶²Hayden never designed another building. She died in 1953.

¹⁶³Weiman, 262.

¹⁶⁴See illustrations for a picture of the Woman's and Children's Buildings.

women.

More than twenty-seven million people attended the Chicago Exposition.¹⁶⁵ The Woman's Building was one of the most visited buildings at the Exposition.¹⁶⁶ With more than sixty different rooms, the Woman's Building received far more acclaim than even the Lady Managers could have imagined. The French Commission wrote that "for every one person who saw their exhibit in the Manufacturers Building, ten people saw the French Exhibit in the Woman's Building."¹⁶⁷

While Palmer had the final word on the Woman's Building, she still had to work with hundreds of artists, sculptors, suffragists, and the male commissioners. Daniel Burnham chose Frank T. Millet as the chief advisor on art. Millet was also responsible for the exterior and interior colors of the buildings, the complete plans for all the ceremonies, and dealing with the artists who would do all of the statues and murals for the fair. Although Millet supposedly had artistic control over the buildings, Bertha Palmer picked all of the artists for the Woman's Building.

Bertha selected her friend, Mary Cassatt, to paint the large mural entitled *Modern Woman* that hung high in the central court. Cassatt's painting hung above the inscription, *Architect Sophia Hayden*.¹⁶⁸ She also chose Mary MacMonnies to paint the other mural that hung directly across from Cassatt's mural, above the words *President Bertha*

¹⁶⁵Miller, 65.

¹⁶⁶Farmer, 10.

¹⁶⁷Weiman, 267.

¹⁶⁸Weiman, 315.

Palmer.¹⁶⁹ After selecting the mural artists, Millet mailed contracts to both women in July of 1892, with demands that their sketches be submitted for his approval before beginning their work. He also told the artists that their work must be completed by October and informed the women they would not be paid until their work was complete. Because the women knew that the male artists were paid before their work was completed, that they had almost total control over their creations, and that their work did not have to be completed by October, both artists refused to sign the contracts. Bertha stepped in for the artists and negotiated with Millet. After Bertha's intervention, the artists received an extension until February 15, 1893, to complete their work, and they agreed that Sarah Hallowell could approve their sketches. Palmer assured Cassatt and MacMonnies that they would receive the same amount of money, and on the same terms, as the male artists who were completing a mural for the Fair.¹⁷⁰ While Millet may have been the chief advisor, Bertha Palmer still proved to be the person in charge. However, Bertha's selection of Cassatt caused controversy from the time the murals were displayed.

Cassatt's mural, depicting her vision of modern women, in three separate panels, drew many negative comments.¹⁷¹ Cassatt painted her mural in the French Impressionist style and found the intent of her mural misunderstood by most who viewed it. Frances

¹⁶⁹Weiman, 316.

¹⁷⁰Susanne Lindsay, *Mary Cassatt and Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1985) 213.

¹⁷¹See illustrations for the center panel of Cassatt's "Modern Woman."

Willard used words like “trivial and undignified” to describe Cassatt’s painting.¹⁷² The *Tribune Critic* called *Modern Woman*, “decidedly disappointing,” and the *Chicago Tribune* called it “dark and heavy, with figures that were out of scale with the remainder of the decoration.”¹⁷³ Cassatt was so insulted by the negative reactions her mural received that she declined an invitation to spend the summer in Chicago, and remained in Paris instead.¹⁷⁴ MacMonnies’ mural, on the other hand, received as much praise as Cassatt’s had criticism.

MacMonnies’ mural, called *Primitive Woman*, was painted in one large panel.¹⁷⁵ Considered lighter and more realistic than Cassatt’s painting, MacMonnies received praise for her continuous landscape background.¹⁷⁶ This statement was as much an attack on Cassatt’s painting and her style, as it was a compliment to MacMonnies. The fact that MacMonnies’ husband, was a well-known, and greatly admired artist, may have slanted the public perception of her work, and added to the misunderstanding of Cassatt’s work. While controversy surrounded her choice of artists, Bertha had protected and pacified these artists. However, Palmer still had to deal with the controversial issues involving the lack of participation by black women and finding space for the suffragists

¹⁷²Weiman, 314.

¹⁷³Weiman, 316.

¹⁷⁴Nancy Mowell Mathews, ed. *Cassatt: A Retrospective* (Chicago: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc., 1996) 24.

¹⁷⁵Mary MacMonnies’ husband, Frederick, a noted sculptor, created the central fountain at the 1893 exposition, receiving a fee of \$50,000.

¹⁷⁶Weiman, 203.

in the Woman's Building.

The National Commission for the Exposition was comprised only of white men.

With this realization, black women hoped to find an official role in the Exposition through the Woman's Building. According to Ida B. Wells, in separate appeals to the BLM, at least two black women's groups, the Women's Columbian Auxiliary Association and the Woman's Columbian Association submitted proposals for exhibits that represented all blacks.¹⁷⁷ According to Wells, these separate appeals gave the BLM reason to deny their request because it showed division among black women. A letter Bertha wrote to her friend, Mary Cantrill of Kentucky, confirmed Wells contention, and Bertha's belief that these applications showed division. Bertha wrote:

Our Board was entirely willing to appoint a national representative for the Negro women and only refrained from doing so because they were quarreling so among themselves and could not decide on a candidate. There were four organizations in the field, each struggling for supremacy and each abusing the other three.¹⁷⁸

Although it may have been just an excuse to pass the problem along to someone else, by dismissing the entire problem back to the state boards, the BLM felt vindicated and relieved of any official responsibility. Ultimately, only New York appointed a black woman to the Board and only three black people, a black man and two women, held clerical positions at the Exposition.¹⁷⁹ Eventually the Lady Managers gave black women

¹⁷⁷ "The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition," *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, Trudier Harris, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.5.

¹⁷⁸Weiman, 114.

¹⁷⁹Harris, 129.

a small "Afro-American" exhibit placed in a distant corner of the Woman's Building.¹⁸⁰

Given the times in which she lived, the pressure of her position, and her desire to please as many people as she could, Bertha handled each issue in the best way she could.

Bertha Palmer's "intent" was to work for the good of the many and not the few. After the problems of black participation, Bertha then had to contend with the demands for space in the Woman's Building by the council of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

In 1890, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's National Woman Suffrage Association joined forces with Lucy Stone's American Woman Suffrage Association, and formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).¹⁸¹ Susan B. Anthony, a friend of Bertha's, became the President of the newly formed organization in 1892.¹⁸² The National Council of Women (NCW), in which Anthony's club and fifty-three other women's organizations were members, appointed Anthony the spokesperson for the organization. Anthony then asked Palmer for adequate space in the Woman's Building, "so those of its affiliated organizations that wished to exhibit under its wings," might have the room to do so.¹⁸³ Anthony was willing to accept the fact that the Board would not give her Suffrage Association a specific space, as long

¹⁸⁰Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1995) 37.

¹⁸¹Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, Inc., 1980) 4, 95-96.

¹⁸²Farmer, 492.

¹⁸³Weiman, 491.

as the NCW had adequate space. When Anthony discovered the small amount of space actually provided for the NCW, she wrote two letters to Palmer. In a letter dated, April 11, 1893, Anthony writes:

. . . Our national Association did consent not to ask for separate space--but it was with the expectation-the promise of ample space within the rooms to be allotted to the National Council--which I now learn is to be very limited--but my dear Mrs. Palmer-while I shall be very sorry not to have the space we need--I shall surely make the most of what you are able to give us. . . . I shall trust you to do the best you can.¹⁸⁴

Regardless of their differing views regarding suffrage, the letters of inquiry to Palmer from Anthony still demonstrated the respect she held for Bertha and for the difficult position she held. Palmer found additional room for Anthony and in a second letter, dated April 18, 1893, Anthony thanked Palmer for finding more room for the National Council. Anthony wrote, ". . . I knew if it were in your power you would give us room commensurate with our proportions."¹⁸⁵ While they lived very different lives, and approached the issues regarding suffrage and equality for women differently, Anthony and Palmer had come to understand, and respect, each others position.¹⁸⁶

Although Bertha continued to work through each problem that arose, the controversy between the Isabella Society and the BLM continued. To escape the

¹⁸⁴Susan B. Anthony to Mrs. Palmer, April 11, 1893, in the Personal Papers of Bertha Palmer. Chicago Historical Society.

¹⁸⁵Letter to Mrs. Palmer, dated April 18, 1893, from Susan B. Anthony. Housed in the Chicago Historical Society.

¹⁸⁶The busts of Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Dr. Caroline Winslow, a feminist homeopathic physician, were placed in the Court of Honor in the Woman's Building.

continual tensions in Chicago, and to interest the women of the world in the Chicago Exposition, Palmer began traveling abroad.

Understanding the importance of the participation of women in this Exposition, Bertha felt that the more foreign governments she could persuade to support the role of their women in the Exposition, the better the Woman's Building would be. Armed with a letter of introduction from internationally known Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln and the American Ambassador to England, Bertha began her journey.¹⁸⁷ A proud and determined representative of Chicago, Bertha persuaded many foreign countries to participate in the Exposition after they initially refused.

In England, Bertha met with resistance to the idea of women's full participation in the Exposition. Meeting with Princess Christian, the third daughter of Queen Victoria, Bertha explained the design for the building and her ideas for women's participation in the Exposition.¹⁸⁸ After listening to Bertha, Princess Christian became alarmed. The Princess opposed women who publicly fought for their rights and felt that "women should be trained only to care for their families, beautify the home and nurse the sick."¹⁸⁹ However, after additional meetings with Bertha, Princess Christian not only agreed to participate, but led the English delegation of women. Bertha then went to Paris to convince the French government to allow the women of France to participate in the

¹⁸⁷Ross, 59.

¹⁸⁸Princess Christian's given name is Helena Augusta Victoria, but after her marriage, July 5, 1866, to Prince Frederick Christian, she became known as Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein.

¹⁸⁹Ross, 60.

Exposition.¹⁸⁹

Mme. Carnot, wife of the President of France, was opposed to women who used extreme measures to cause change and initially refused to participate. However, after listening to Bertha speak about her desires and plans for the Woman's Building, in perfect French, an impressed Madame Carnot not only agreed to participate, but she also agreed to serve on the French Woman's Committee.¹⁹⁰ While the conversation between Bertha and Madame Carnot are not known, she used her talent for diplomatic persuasion successfully from country to country. From France, Bertha's next stop was Italy.

In Italy, Palmer met with Queen Margherita. After several meetings with Palmer, the Queen agreed to participate in the fair. Bertha so impressed the Queen that she sent priceless ancient laces for display at the Exposition. Until the Board displayed the laces at the Columbian Exposition, they had not been out of Italy since Roman armies brought them back from Egyptian tombs, hundreds of years before Christ.¹⁹¹ As a result of these meetings, Queen Margherita and Bertha became lifelong friends.

Bertha returned to the United States with the satisfaction of reporting to the BLM that nearly every country she contacted agreed to participate in the Exposition.¹⁹²

Ultimately, a total of thirty-six nations, forty-six states and territories of the United States, and a multitude of private organization, participated in the Columbian

¹⁹⁰Ross, 58.

¹⁹¹Farmer, 217

¹⁹²Witter, 5.

Exposition.¹⁹³ Although each state gave its women a small portion of the state's building to exhibit their skills and achievements, the ability to view the accomplishments of women from the United States, and around the world, in a separate Woman's Building, would not have been possible without Bertha's work. In the official guide to the WCE, compiled by Rand McNally, it is written, "Without Mrs. Bertha Palmer there would not be a Woman's Building," a point few people could rationally argue against.¹⁹⁴

Still, some of Palmer's critics considered the traveling she did for the Exposition a needless perk and the attention she received excessive. Rumors flew that Bertha's trips to Europe were at the Board's expense and that her salary was exorbitant. Palmer's trips abroad were taken at her own expense, a point that may not have been publicized by Bertha.¹⁹⁵ For her role as the President of the BLM, Palmer was to receive a salary of \$5000. Except for the portion of her salary used to pay a private secretary to help with correspondence, Palmer refused a salary. In a report to the Executive Committee, submitted by Bertha after the Exposition, she wrote, "I felt that it was a pleasure to do the work without any salary."¹⁹⁶ Any amount of attention Bertha received for her work could not compensate her for the task she undertook as the BLM President.

Bertha had to be aware of, and respond to, thousands of important and minuscule

¹⁹³Muccigrosso, 94.

¹⁹⁴Rand McNally's Handbook, 20.

¹⁹⁵Kirkland, 430.

¹⁹⁶"Report of the Executive Committee of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition." (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co, 1892) 3 September 1892. 11.

details regarding the Woman's Building. She wrote and responded to thousands of letters of inquiry about the Woman's Building and its exhibits.¹⁹⁷ The Chicago Historical Society has more than two and one-half linear feet of documents, more than 7700 separate pieces of material, that were addressed to, or pertained to the Woman's Building, and/or Bertha Palmer. Bertha also had to worry about the funding for the building. By successfully addressing both the state and federal appropriation committees, unusual actions for a woman in the late nineteenth century, Bertha brought in more than \$280,000 to build and operate the Woman's Building.¹⁹⁸

By the opening of the Exposition in 1893, Palmer had succeeded in having her department placed on the same level as all the departments operated by men. As well, in an attempt to ensure a degree of fairness in the judging of the exhibits, Bertha managed to have women judges placed in all areas of the Exposition in which women's work would be included.¹⁹⁹

Another responsibility required of Palmer during her work for the Exposition, was to give several speeches about and for the Exposition. The powerful speeches Bertha Palmer gave in conjunction with the Exposition, contained a common theme addressing the hardships faced by working women. She was also concerned with the

¹⁹⁷Housed in Chicago's Historical Society is a portion of the correspondence received by Mrs. Palmer dated from 1890-1894. There are also fifty-five volumes of notes on committee meetings, membership list, reports on exhibits, and the woman's building.

¹⁹⁸"Bertha Honoré Palmer, 1849-1922." *The Art Institute of Chicago*. Paper received from Ken Price, Director of Public Relations, Palmer House Hilton. April 4, 1997.

¹⁹⁹Jachimowicz, 19.

lack of educational opportunities available for women. Throughout her speeches, Bertha expressed her belief that an educated woman could obtain better jobs, enabling her make more money, to help support her family.

In the first speech she gave regarding the WCE, Bertha addressed the Fortnightly Club detailing her desires, and goals for the Woman's Building. The Fortnightly, of which Bertha was a member, was a social club interested in the arts and literature.

Bertha felt it was important that the Woman's Building display the living and working conditions of all women around the world. Bertha said:

The desire of the Board of lady Managers is to present a complete picture of the condition of women in every country of the world at this moment, and more particularly of those women who are bread-winners. We wish to know whether they continue to do the hard, wearing work of the world at prices which will not maintain life, and under unhealthy conditions.²⁰⁰

To present an accurate picture of the condition of the world's women, before the Exposition, Bertha asked for, and received, data on working women, and children, around the world. During the Exposition, in the south record room of the Woman's Building, Bertha displayed the statistics she received. Information about women workers, their place in society, and about the educational opportunities open to women were on display.²⁴⁰ In every speech Palmer gave during her work for the Exposition, she repeated her concerns about the lack of proper education for women, the inequality experienced by women, and harsh economic conditions working women had to endure.

²⁰⁰Mrs. Potter Palmer, "Address to the Fortnightly Club." *Addresses and Reports of Mrs. Potter Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1894) 3-4.

²⁴⁰Weiman, 362.

Bertha's beliefs about equality upset and angered many men and women. However, Bertha Palmer had a talent for making her point without coming to the point. In an effort to alleviate the concerns that the people had who still believed that the only place for a woman was in the home, Bertha explained her theory of equality to the Fortnightly. Palmer said:

I have a private theory that when the sexes have equal opportunity, and each seeks the direction most congenial to its tastes, the minds of women will be found to turn in more practical directions, and men will prove to be the poets and dreamers of the race. This practical turn that women take may be the result of the forcing they have had during so many generations in the direction of making one dollar do the work of two toward supplying all the comforts and opportunities desired for their families; when woman is free from this pressure she may, perhaps, become more of an idealist.²⁴¹

It seems doubtful that Palmer really believed that if given a choice, women would become "idealists," but she made it clear that they at least deserved the right to have a choice about the direction their lives would take. Even when Bertha's remarks offended others, she did not tread lightly as the other speeches she gave during the Exposition demonstrate.

During the dedication ceremonies of the WCE, on October 21, 1892, Bertha directed her remarks to men in general, and in particular, to the men, like the Reverend F.D. Fulton, who furthered the myth of the delicate nature of a woman's mind. In 1867 Fulton had announced that, "Women cannot compete with man in a long course of mental labor. The female mind is rather quiet and timid than fury and driving. It

²⁴¹Mrs. Potter Palmer, "Address to the Fortnightly Club," 4. Ceremonies, 117.

admires rather than covets the great exploits of the other sex."²⁴² Denying that women were too weak to learn, too dull to retain knowledge, and became unattractive to men after receiving an education, Palmer said:

... Women, as a sex, have been liberated. They now have time to think, to be educated, to plan and pursue careers of their own choosing. . . . It is not strange that woman is drinking deeply of the long-denied fountain of knowledge. She had been told, until she almost believes it, by her physician, that she was too delicate and nervous an organization to endure the application and mental strain of the schoolroom; by the scientist, that the quality of gray matter of her brain would not enable her to grasp the exact sciences, and that its peculiar convolutions made it impossible to follow a logical proposition from premise to conclusion; by her anxious parents, that there was nothing so abominated as a learned woman.²⁴³

Bertha further stated that women who were forced to work in order to clothe and feed their children, were constantly at the mercy of the men who employed them. She said:

Of all existing forms of injustice there is none so cruel and inconsistent as is the position in which women are placed with regard to self-maintenance, the calm ignoring of their rights and responsibilities which has gone on for centuries. If the economic conditions are hard for men to meet, subjected as they are to the constant weeding out of the less expert and steady hands, it is evident that women, thrown upon their own resources, have a frightful struggle to endure, especially as they have always to contend against a public sentiment which discountenances their seeking industrial employment as a means of livelihood.²⁴²

Palmer could not understand how an educated woman could threaten a man's position in the workplace or in the home. In her speech at the Dedication ceremony, Bertha said:

²⁴²Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 2.

²⁴³*Addresses and Reports of Mrs. Potter Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1894) Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Dedicatory Ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition, in the Manufacturers Building, October 21, 1892. 117.

²⁴²Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Dedicatory Ceremonies, 117.

What is to be done with this strong, self-poised creature of glowing imagination and high ideals, who evidently intends, as a natural and inherent right, to pursue her self-development in her chosen line of work? Is the world ready to give her industrial and intellectual independence, and to open all doors before her? The human race is not so rich in talent, genius, and useful creative energy that it can afford to allow any considerable proportion of these valuable attributes to be wasted or unproductive, even though they may be possessed by women.²⁴³

In closing her address, which drew loud applause from both men and women present, Palmer said, "Even more important than the discovery of Columbus, which we are gathered together to celebrate, is the fact that the General Government has just discovered woman."²⁴³ Palmer's speeches clearly supported many issues of the feminist agenda, such as equality in the work place, the right to pursue a career of choice, the failure of men to financially support their families and to treat their wives and daughters with dignity and respect, not as possessions.

The 1893 WCE officially opened on May 1, 1893. Bertha's speech on the opening of the Woman's Building on the same day, reflected her belief that being placed on a pedestal, for most women, was neither a satisfying nor a true picture of their lives. Bertha said "Freedom and justice for all are infinitely more to be desired than a pedestal for a few."²⁴⁴ In her speech she protested the helplessness of women, condemned their menial wages, and spoke of the victimization of women who, either by choice or circumstance, worked outside the home. She added:

The theory which exists among conservative people, that the sphere of

²⁴³Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Dedicatory Ceremonies, 118.

²⁴³Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Dedicatory Ceremonies, 121.

²⁴⁴Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building, 132-133.

woman is her home, that it is unfeminine, even monstrous, for her to wish a place beside or even to compete with men in the various lucrative industries tells heavily against her, for manufacturers and producers take advantage of it to disparage her work and obtain her service for a nominal price, thus profiting largely by the necessities and helplessness of their victim.²⁴⁵

Bertha berated the very men she entertained in her home when she accused business owners of continually placing women in unsafe working conditions and paying them considerably less money, simply because of their sex.

Bertha expanded the scope of her message in this speech to include the rising uncertainty that the people of Chicago were facing as economic conditions began to deteriorate before, and during, the Exposition. Palmer said that many women were forced to work because, "the necessity for their work under present conditions is too evident and too urgent to be questioned, they must work or they must starve."²⁴⁶ She presented a dramatic comparison of the fates that the women of the United States faced, with women of the Orient and India. Palmer said:

Our Oriental neighbors have seen the logic of the situation far more clearly than we, and have been consistent enough to meet it without shrinking from heroic measures when necessary. The question is happily solved in some countries by the practice of polygamy, which allows every man to maintain many wives as his means permit. In other, etiquette requires that a newly made widow be burned on the funeral pyre with her husband's body, while the Chinese take the precaution to drown surplus female children. It would seem that any of these methods is more logical and less cruel than the system we pursue of permitting the entire

²⁴⁵ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building, 133.

²⁴⁶ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building, May 1, 1893, 136.

²⁴⁶ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building, 134. ²⁴⁶ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Closing of the Woman's Building, October 31, 1893, 155.

female population to live, but making it impossible for those born in poverty to maintain themselves in comfort, because they are hampered by a caste feeling almost as strong as that ruling in India, which will not permit them to work on equal terms with men.²⁴⁷

Many current women could have written the speech Bertha gave at the closing ceremonies of the Woman's Building. In this speech Bertha addressed the constant attacks on mothers who were forced to leave their children, in order to support them. Addressing the same concerns that women still express today, regarding husbands and fathers who do not support their family, Bertha said:

... If we consider it an established principle that it is the duty of the husband and father to maintain his wife and children, then we must look at the fact in the face that most men are failures. . . . We have heard for years of the incompetent wife and mother, but it occurs to me that we have heard singularly little of the incompetent husband and father. . . . It would now seem to be the fact that very few marriages could now occur if women were not able to assist in maintaining the home. Perhaps we are, however unreasonable in expecting men at the present stage of civilization to support their families unassisted by their wives.²⁴⁸

Continuing her theme of education, Palmer closed this speech by encouraging women to seek the technical training and education to supplement their family's income if they needed or wanted such training. She said:

Should men discover at any time in the future that they are capable of assuming the entire maintenance of the house, women can undoubtedly be persuaded to give up the tedious and wearing grind of the factory, the shop and the office, to turn to higher service. Until that fortunate moment arrives the wise course would seem to be the acceptance of the facts as they exist. . . . Women prove to be no less sweet because they are strong,

²⁴⁷ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Opening of the Woman's Building, May 1, 1893. 136.

²⁴⁸ Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Closing of the Woman's Building, October 31, 1893. 155.

and Ida B. Wells no less companionable because their opinions are based on knowledge rather than prejudice, no less attractive and fascinating because they have given up superficial accomplishments for the practical knowledge that make them true helpmates and burden-sharers. . . .²⁴⁹

Although Bertha personally believed that the best place for a woman was in the home, providing a safe and happy haven for her husband and children, she also believed that a woman could only enhance her roles as a wife, a mother, and a wage-earner, with an education. Bertha's speeches attempted to address the needs and concerns of all women in all situations. However, the speeches given during the opening week of the Exposition by over seven-hundred women, covered many ideas, fears, and concerns.

Bertha Palmer asked the fair director for a separate Woman's Branch of the World's Congress Auxiliary, since the men had their own speakers scheduled throughout the fair. After receiving permission, Palmer asked Ellen Henrotin, vice-president of the BLM, to begin scheduling speakers for women.²⁵⁰ Henrotin scheduled more than three hundred and thirty female speakers. Anticipating large crowds, they held the Woman's Congress away from the Exposition in the Art Palace, on Michigan Avenue. Beginning on May 15, the Congress of Representative Women held eighty-one sessions, running as many as eighteen sessions at once, in which women could speak about the topic of their concern. After Bertha opened the session with a brief speech, women spoke on topics that included functional and radical attire for women, religious intolerance, temperance, and the plight of black women. While Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Jane Addams,

²⁴⁹Address delivered by Mrs. Potter Palmer at the Closing of the Woman's Building. October 31, 1893, p. 155-157.

²⁵⁰Weiman, 530.

and Ida B. Wells gave speeches, the topics that drew the most attention, and created the most controversy, were those given on dress reform.²⁵¹

The creation of a separate Woman's Building allowed women a unique place in the WCE. It also gave a multitude of women the chance to present their new, and sometimes considered radical, ideas, particularly in regards to women's clothing. Pictures of Bertha Palmer show her wearing only elegant dresses, suits, and hats. Given reports of her sister's trousseau, the tiny waist Bertha displayed in pictures, and her upbringing, it can be concluded that corsets were a part of her everyday life. Although it is not known how she felt about shorter hemlines and pants for women, speakers, such as May Wright Sewall, Frances E. Russell, and Rachel Foster Avery, offered many new and radical clothing ideas for women, such as shorter hemlines and wearing bloomers.²⁵² Some women suggested shortening the hems of dresses to above the ankle to prevent filthy hemlines. Others suggested that women should be allowed to wear long pants, particularly when bicycling or cleaning. Although some women found the idea of wearing pants appalling, others found them far more comfortable and functional than the heavy, binding, and impractical garments, they currently wore. Although the majority of women could not agree on what to wear, the lectures held on dress reform were extremely popular, second in attendance only to the Parliament of Religions lectures.²⁵³

²⁵¹Weiman, 531.

²⁵²Weiman, 531, 532, 533.

²⁵³The Art Palace, originally known as the Crystal Palace, is now known as the Art Institute of Chicago.

Ultimately, an additional three-hundred and seventy women gave unscheduled speeches, during the Woman's Congress, doubling the initial list of scheduled speakers. When the Congress of Representative Women came to a close on May 21, eighteen ordained women ministers delivered the closing prayers.²⁵⁴ With the Congresses behind them, the women now had time to visit the fair and the Woman's Building.

All of the work and controversy the BLM dealt with for two years seemed less important when the 1893 WCE opened on May 1, 1893. Still, even after the Woman's Building opened, Bertha faced another group of unhappy and vocal women. On the fourth day of the Exposition, Bertha entered the Woman's Building only to come face-to-face with a group of unhappy board members. The women had grown increasingly upset that Bertha had received too much praise and prestige, while they had been denied the rights to meet the influential people she had. The leader of the opposition was Phoebe Couzins, the former secretary to the BLM, and a member of the QIS.²⁵⁵

Phoebe Couzins had been dismissed as the secretary to the BLM in a unanimous vote by the BLM, which included members of the QIS. Couzins dismissal was caused by her constant verbal attacks on members of the Board, her neglect of duties as the BLM secretary, and her attempts to create discord between other members of the Board.²⁵⁶ Her replacement by Susan Gale Cooke, a supporter of Bertha's, caused Couzins to sue the

²⁵⁴Weiman, 545.

²⁵⁵Dedmon, 228.

²⁵⁶Weiman, 263.

Board, but the suit was dismissed in a Chicago court in June of 1893.²⁵⁷

After Bertha listened to Couzins' objections, Bertha rose to address the women. Although she was upset, Bertha spoke slowly and eloquently, to keep her emotions under control. Bertha said:

I presume that all of this discontent cannot have existed without some reproach upon me, and I refer to that matter with the greatest reluctance and humiliation. I do not wish to make any defense or plea. Good intentions count for nothing. . . . We have thought we were working together as a band of women for something fine, for representing the interests of women. . . . that we mark an epoch. . . . If I am mistaken in that estimate and we are all torn up and pulling hair over an introduction to a Duchess, I have nothing to say to this board except that I feel deeply humiliated.²⁵⁸

Many members of the Board began crying after Bertha's moving speech. After the women composed themselves, they moved and passed a vote of confidence for Bertha: only Couzins and four other delegates expressed their dissent by not voting.²⁵⁹ With the last confrontation during the Exposition behind her, Bertha and the Board could now enjoy the fair and the Woman's Building.

The Woman's Building contained many exhibits and new innovations. Among other things, the Woman's Building contained a model hospital with women physicians and trained nurses in attendance, a model kitchen with the latest in modern conveniences, and cooking classes were held daily. The roof top gardens, originally intended to be a haven for the staff of the Woman's Building and the Lady Managers

²⁵⁷Weiman, 74-77.

²⁵⁸Dedmon, 228.

²⁵⁹Dedmon, 229.

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²⁵⁷Weiman, 74-77.

²⁵⁸Dedmon, 228.

²⁵⁹Dedmon, 229.

were quickly discovered by others. At the suggestion of a Lady Manager, Boston Cooking School graduate, Mrs. E. W. Riley turned the gardens into a restaurant.²⁶⁰ On Chicago Day at the Fair, October 9, 1893, the restaurant served a record 4,800 dinners and Riley made a profit of \$44,000 for her work at the Fair, more than any other similar concession.²⁶¹

Bertha's work for the Exposition also included the entertaining of visiting guests, royalty, and dignitaries. The Palmers, in order to give prestige to the Spanish section of the Exposition, and to create additional publicity for the fair, gave a reception in honor of the visiting Infanta Eulala of Spain.²⁶² Everything Bertha Palmer did was a result of careful planning and self-control was her fetish. Crying, hysterics, or rude behavior, was not a part of Bertha Palmer's personality. The Infanta of Spain gave Bertha a chance to demonstrate to the city of Chicago, and ultimately to the nation, the graciousness and self-control she possessed.

The Palmers had taken special care to install the Infanta in the most luxurious suite at the Palmer House Hotel. The suite was equipped with an "Egyptian parlor and a pearl inlaid bed."²⁶³ Bertha had sent over some of her best linens and crystal to the hotel to please the Infanta. However, once the Infanta realized that the party held in her honor

²⁶⁰Weiman, 267.

²⁶¹Weiman, 268.

²⁶²An Infanta is a daughter of the king or queen of Spain or Portugal. An Infante is the son of the king and queen of Spain or Portugal.

²⁶³Mary Hastings Bradley, *Old Chicago: Based on Notes Kept by Mary Hastings Bradley* 4 vol. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1933) 65.

was given by the "innkeeper's wife," she decided not to attend.²⁶⁴

On a rainy and muddy May night the Palmers' home was filled with dignitaries. The Spanish Ambassador talked to the Infanta and pleaded with her to attend the party at the Palmers. Although she grudgingly agreed to attend, the Infanta's disposition did not improve after riding through the muddy streets of Chicago.

Mary Hastings Bradley, who attended the reception in the Palmer home, recalled the events of the evening. Bradley noted that the Infanta, "came an hour late, and she went outrageously early and sat on the dais sulky and unsmiling, without any response to the guest presented to her."²⁶⁵ Guests waiting to greet the Infanta included vice-president Adlai Stevenson, Robert Todd Lincoln,²⁶⁶ the governors of New York and Kentucky, Julia Ward Howe and nearly two-hundred other distinguished guests.²⁶⁷ After speaking harsh words to Bertha, the Infanta left before dinner. The special dais Palmer had installed for the comfort of the Infanta remained empty most of the evening. However, many sources noted that Palmer did not speak an ill word of the Infanta's behavior, but simply continued to entertain the rest of her guests as if nothing had happened.²⁶⁸ Mary

²⁶⁴Bradley, 65.

²⁶⁵Bradley, 65.

²⁶⁶Robert Lincoln, a close friend of Bertha's made his living as the head counsel for the Pullman Company. In 1897, after the death of George Pullman, Lincoln became the president of the Pullman Company.

²⁶⁷Farmer, 105.

²⁶⁸It was also noted in various sources that Palmer and the Infanta became friends a number of years later.

Bradley wrote, "I'll tell you who were the real aristocrats of the evening--it was Mrs. Potter Palmer, who played the hostess like a true queen."²⁶⁹

Just as she did in everything she undertook, Bertha Palmer worked above and beyond the duties required of her as the President of the BLM. In her role as Chicago's hostess, Bertha did the usual and the unusual. For more than three years Bertha Palmer worked for the WCE. She handled more than sixty women's organizations and many feminists who scrutinized every action she took. If Palmer knew that a particular exhibit, or concession, was suffering financially she would visit it, and if a concession, make substantial purchases. With the mere presence of Bertha at an exhibit, or concession, attendance would rise.²⁷⁰

During the Exposition the Palmer home became a traveler's aid station. Many times as many as a half-dozen babies could be found lying asleep on Palmer's bed while she took their mothers to the fair.²⁷¹ Several young women attending the fair without rooming accommodations, stayed at Palmer's home. Every day Bertha made her carriage available to take elderly or ailing visitors from Jackson Park.²⁷² Bertha provided free lunches for the young girls who worked on the fair grounds as guides and messengers. During the Exposition, Bertha entertained nearly every celebrity in attendance and all the women who worked in an official capacity for the Exposition. Bertha also did everything

²⁶⁹Bradley, 66.

²⁷⁰Farmer, 466.

²⁷¹Farr, 182.

²⁷²Ross, 92-93.

possible to make it easier for women with children to attend the fair.

Palmer and the BLM realized that without child care arrangements many women would be unable to attend the fair. Palmer, denied any additional government or state funding, held a three-day bazaar in her home to raise the funds to build a Children's Building. With the cooperation of the Chicago Woman's Club the women sold everything from baked goods to the official souvenir spoon. The spoon was designed by Bertha and had a reproduction of both the Children's Building and a likeness of Bertha imprinted upon it. Profits from the bazaar totaled more than \$35,000, which covered the cost of the Children's Building.²⁷³

The Children's Building was adjacent to the Women's Building. For twenty-five cents a day, parents could leave their children in the care of trained workers and enjoy the fair. Bertha's commitment to education was clear in the Children's building. Classes in proper child care and physical activity were held for interested parents. A special section in the Children's Building was designed especially for deaf children. A gymnasium, staffed by qualified instructors and equipped with every known machine and device for physical development, proved to be a popular attraction. A nursery staffed by nurses and female doctors, attended to the needs of infants. In a room called the *Educational Building*, boys and girls were instructed in the arts, sciences, carpentry, and the use of tools. That girls were educated in such matters was unusual in its self, but

²⁷³Weiman, 33.

Bertha felt that a new format, a coed format, should be used in the Children's Building.²⁶⁹

More than 10,000 children used the facility and only one child was lost, or abandoned, during the fair.²⁷⁰ Bertha now had the women with children taken care of, but there were still thousands of young and unescorted women who needed housing.

In order to provide affordable housing for single women, the BLM developed The Woman's Dormitory Association. Stocks were issued to female shareholders at ten dollars a share. Each share carried a coupon that allowed the female holder to stay in the dormitory twenty-five days free. Non-shareholders could rent a room, if it were available, for fifty-cents a day. If the dormitory made money then the stockholders would receive a dividend.²⁷¹

George Pullman offered the Board a piece of land near the Exposition to build the dormitory, but withdrew his offer as plans progressed. Another piece of land was found about a mile away from the fair. To ensure that the building would be ready by the time of the Exposition, Bertha paid for the designs herself instead of waiting to raise more money.²⁷² A simple two-story structure was built containing sleeping rooms for one-thousand women. Neat and clean, the Woman's Dormitory provided shelter for over

²⁶⁹J.W. Buel, *The Magic City: A Massive Portfolio of Original Photographic Views of the Great World's Fair* (St. Louis, Historical Publishing Company, 1894) page numbers absent.

²⁷⁰Virginia Grant Darney, "Women and World's Fairs, 1876-1904." Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1982.

²⁷¹Weiman, 324-330.

²⁷²Weiman, 328.

twelve-thousand women over a four-month period.²⁷³ While the dormitory stock did not make money for its stockholders, the enterprise did break even. The Lady Managers considered it quite an accomplishment that no undertaking by women, for women, during the Exposition lost money.

As the Exposition drew to a close, Bertha was preparing to give her closing speech, scheduled for October 31, 1893. Yet, this was a somber day for Bertha, and for the citizens of Chicago, not just because the Exposition was over, but because her friend, and the Mayor of Chicago, Carter Harrison, had been assassinated two days earlier.

On October 28, 1893, in his fifth term of office, Mayor Harrison had just returned home after giving a speech.²⁷⁴ Harrison encouraged the citizens of Chicago to stop by his home to say hello, or to discuss any problems they might have. The Mayor heard the doorbell and answered the door. Without saying a word, Patrick Prendergast, a disgruntled office seeker who was mad at the Mayor for not appointing him to a Corporation Counsel position, shot the Mayor five times, killing him instantly.²⁷⁵

Bertha carried out her duties as expected, and gave her final speech eloquently despite the loss of her friend. Expressing her final sentiments about the Exposition, and the women who visited and participated in the Fair, Bertha said:

When our palace in the White City shall have vanished like a dream, when grass and flowers cover the beautiful spot where it now stands, its memory and influence will still remain with those who have been brought together

²⁷³Weiman, 330.

²⁷⁴McKenna, 34.

²⁷⁵Miller, 436 and McKenna, 34.

within its walls."²⁷⁶

The 1893 Columbian Exposition was over. The BLM, to show their appreciation to Palmer, commissioned Anders L. Zorn to paint her official portrait.²⁷⁷ Zorn painted the portrait of Bertha holding the gavel she used in the BLM meetings.²⁷⁸

For the first time in America's history, its women had actively, and vocally, participated in a World's Fair. Under the direction of Bertha Palmer the women of the world had come together. Bertha made it possible for women to control the direction of the Woman's Building and to participate as a self-governing body in the Exposition. Palmer saw to it that women competed with men in most areas of the Exposition and that they came together in large groups to discuss controversial ideas. Although it may not have been her intention, Bertha's work moved many women into the public sphere for good. In her speeches Bertha helped to expose the difficulties working women faced, particularly those without an education. Although many of Bertha's peers found fault with many of her actions, or inactions, Palmer did what she thought was best for all women.

In assuming the role of the President of the BLM, Bertha Palmer created a public role for women, created a place for the world to see their art, their talents, and their desires to compete with men on equal terms. Under the direction of Bertha Palmer, the

²⁷⁶Lynn Sherr and Jurate Kazickas, *Susan B. Anthony Slept Here: A Guide to American Women's Landmarks* (New York: Random House: 1976) 129.

²⁷⁷Zorn, who had recently broken his right collar bone, painted Palmer with his normally unused left hand.

²⁷⁸See the illustrations for the Zorn portrait of Palmer painted in 1893.

involvement of women in the Columbian Exposition was a small, yet giant, step for the women of the late nineteenth century.

Although her work for the Exposition was ending, Palmer did not retire to the pampered world of the wealthy. Bertha had worked as a woman's advocate before the Exposition. After the Exposition, as she continued to fulfil her social obligations, Bertha also maintained her work as a woman's advocate.

Although she did not, and perhaps could not, see herself as this new woman, Bertha Palmer fulfilled nearly every component of the many definitions given of such a woman. Historian Nancy Woloch writes that the new woman of the 1890s "integrated Victorian virtues with an activist social role," as Bertha did.²⁸ Palmer was active, forceful, involved in many institutions beyond the family and had an "enhanced sense of gender, and mission."²⁹ Although she denied being a feminist, and it is unclear if she supported the suffrage movement, Bertha possessed the same desires for the equal treatment of women, as many leading feminists.

When Susan B. Anthony expanded the focus of her movement to include

²⁸ Duffels, 18.

²⁹ Dedmon, 127.

³⁰ Woloch, 269.

³¹ Woloch, 269.

Chapter Three: Bertha Palmer~Woman's Advocate

Palmer's move into the public sphere coincided with the rise of the feminist movement in the United States. After the Civil War, women began to realize that they were the only ones who would, or could, change the role to which men had assigned them.²⁷⁹ As more women became involved in the movement for women's rights, talk and interest grew in this "new" type of emerging woman. In 1879, Bertha remarked, "One hears so much about the 'new woman' that one is in danger of being bored by her unless she arrives quickly."²⁸⁰ Still, as mentioned before, Bertha Palmer embodied the *new woman* emerging in America.

Although she did not, and perhaps could not, see herself as this new woman, Bertha Palmer fulfilled nearly every component of the many definitions given of such a woman. Historian Nancy Woloch writes that the new woman of the 1890s "integrated Victorian virtues with an activist social role," as Bertha did.²⁸¹ Palmer was active, forceful, involved in many institutions beyond the family and had an "enhanced sense of gender, and mission."²⁸² Although she denied being a feminist, and it is unclear if she supported the suffrage movement, Bertha possessed the same desires for the equal treatment of women, as many leading feminists.

When Susan B. Anthony expanded the focus of her movement to include

²⁷⁹ DuBois, 18.

²⁸⁰ Dedmon, 127.

²⁸¹ Woloch, 269.

²⁸² Woloch, 269.

economic and labor reform for women, as well as the vote, she found a friend in Bertha Palmer.²⁸³ Bertha clearly supported the idea of equal rights of women in the work place and actively fought for such treatment through her club work. Bertha simply believed that men and women should work together, in a safe environment, and receive the same compensation for the same work, period. Bertha, opposed to violence, tears, or threats, felt that a wise woman used the methods available to gain equality in her day, instead of planning for rights that she might gain in the future. For Bertha, those methods included her speeches, her club work, and her position within the community, which enabled her to accomplish her goals.

Reform movements and women's clubs grew rapidly during the late nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century more than 160,000 women participated in a woman's club.²⁸⁴ Sometimes a single event altered the course of a city and the position of women within that city and the Chicago fire of 1871 was one such event. The fire's widespread devastation caused some of the city's leading women to rethink their position in society. After the fire so many people needed so much and yet, there were no organizations to provide relief. Women began to realize that home and community could no longer be separated. By staying totally within the home, these women began to realize that they could not improve the social aspects of their city. The women felt that while rebuilding Chicago physically was imperative, the social and cultural climate of Chicago needed an overhaul as well. The fourteen years before Bertha would assume her

²⁸³DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 20.

²⁸⁴Woloch, 289.

role as President of the BLM, she began moving into the public sphere. One of the first clubs Bertha joined was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

In 1873 Frances Willard began the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Chicago.²⁸⁵ In Chicago there was one saloon for every two-hundred people, and it was the second-largest industry in Chicago.²⁸⁶ Many women considered the use, and abuse, of alcohol by men detrimental to the family. Not only did the men who could least afford it, the working poor, spend their money on alcohol, but when they returned home in their drunken state, wives were abused. Women reported beatings, abuse, and forced unwanted pregnancies from drunken spouses to the WCTU.²⁸⁷ In Chicago in the 1870s and 1880s wages were low, rents were high, and the city became a magnet to immigrants looking for work. Working-class men who spent their hard-earned money on alcohol, instead of their families, became the targets of the WCTU. The WCTU also targeted establishments that sold alcohol to minors.²⁸⁸

Although most of Chicago's businessmen did not support the total elimination of alcohol, they were concerned with the increasing number of crimes associated with illegal consumption of alcohol among minors. In 1877, Chicagoans Potter Palmer,

²⁸⁵Ruth Bordin. *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 78-79.

²⁸⁶Miller, 190.

²⁸⁷Smith-Rosenberg, 46.

²⁸⁸Bordin, 129, 188-189.

George Pullman, Marshall Fields, and others, formed the Citizens League.²⁸⁹ The League was formed to pass and enforce laws regarding the selling of alcohol to children. With the support of the WCTU, legislation prohibiting the sale of alcohol to minors became a reality.

Although Bertha Palmer was not considered a "teetotaler" she was active in the WCTU.²⁹⁰ Bertha supported the WCTU's activities without worrying about the profits that her own Palmer House Hotel made by selling alcohol. Matilda B. Carse, who was the president of the Chicago branch of the WCTU knew she could count on Bertha for help whenever she needed it.²⁹¹ Members of the WCTU accepted Bertha's commitment to the principles of their organization despite the fact that part of her wealth came from the sale of alcohol. Simply having Bertha Palmer as a part of an organization gave its leaders a powerful name to use for publicity and fund raising. Both Bertha and the organization to which she belonged benefitted. Armed with knowledge, power, and an even disposition, Bertha had a knack of vocally supporting an organization or movement without antagonizing those involved on either side of the issue. Bertha displayed this diplomatic manner when she entertained the Cyrus McCormicks and George Pullmans without alienating them with her known sympathies to labor.²⁹²

Graft, improper and inadequate sanitation, uncontrolled child labor, unsafe

²⁸⁹Pierce, Volume 3, 459.

²⁹⁰Weiman, 496.

²⁹¹Ross, 45.

²⁹²Weiman, 19.

working conditions for women, the lack of minimum wages, and the absence of educational programs and trades for women, as well as the evils associated with rapid industrial growth, continued to plague Chicago. These evils affected those members of Chicago's society who could do little about them, the working poor. The women of the temperance movement and the social club, The Fortnightly, of which Bertha was a member, realized that more needed to be done for their city.²⁹³ Although women could not vote, the WCTU drew them into the political arena.²⁹⁴ The WCTU gave women a reason to enter the public sphere, as extensions of their private spheres duties, by protesting the evils of liquor and the effects of drinking on the family.²⁹⁵ The more issues the women of Chicago took on, the more they discovered. In 1881, when Francis Willard used the term "Do everything" she used it to describe a method of accomplishing things.²⁹⁶ Soon this motto became more for women than a way of accomplishing something. Doing everything became the standard for women as they entered the public sphere. By doing everything women would not only plan how to make things better, but they would "do everything" needed to see that their goals were reached.²⁹⁷ The work and

²⁹³ Author's telephone interview with Vicky Fitch, current secretary of the Fortnightly Club. 28 August 1997. According to Fitch, the Fortnightly Club is still an active organization in Chicago today, with over 450 active members in the Club today. Fitch reports that the focus of the Fortnightly is still predominately in the area of arts and literature..

²⁹⁴ Bordin, 70.

²⁹⁵ Bordin, 65-86.

²⁹⁶ Bordin, 130.

²⁹⁷ Bordin, 11, 129, and Smith-Rosenberg, 264.

scope of women's clubs grew so quickly that the women began another club just to address Chicago's social problems affecting working women, the poor, and children.

On February 17, 1876, women who were interested in the growing social problems in Chicago met at the home of Caroline Brown and formed the Chicago Woman's Club (CWC).²⁹⁸ In 1880 Bertha Palmer became a member of the CWC.²⁹⁹ Unlike the Fortnightly Club whose membership was restricted to upper-middle class women, the CWC welcomed women from all economic, social, and marital statuses as members.³⁰⁰ With more than five hundred members by 1890, the CWC was a powerful organization.³⁰¹ Determined to reform the city and its inhabitants, the Woman's Club held meetings in which they discussed everything from reform to philosophy and science.³⁰² The six committees, including the Home Department, the Reform Department, the Art and Literature Department, the Philosophy and Science Department, the Education Department, and the Philanthropy Department, covered a broad range of interests. Depending upon the time, and the issues, the Woman's Club addressed more than a hundred different concerns. The CWC operated an Infant Welfare Program, the Equal Suffrage Department, the Juvenile Court Committee, the Home Teaching of Adult

²⁹⁸Pierce, vol.3, 485.

²⁹⁹Pierce, vol.3, 486.

³⁰⁰Henriette Greenbaum Frank and Amalie Hofer Jerome, *Annals of The Chicago Woman's Club* (Chicago: Chicago Woman's Club, 1916)

³⁰¹Frank and Jerome, 15.

³⁰²Ross, 46.

Blind, and the Tuberculosis Camp.³⁰³ From 1876 to 1916, the CWC received and dispersed \$457,401.42 throughout the Club's six groups.³⁰⁴

Other accomplishments of the Woman's Club included the development of a protective agency for women and children. The Club succeeded in placing a night matron at the police station to protect incarcerated women who were previously at the mercy of an all-male police force. Children who had been arrested were also housed with the adult prisoners until the Woman's Club became involved. At the insistence of the Club members, the Chief of Police appointed a Woman's Advisory Board to look after the new and separate quarters housing incarcerated women and children.³⁰⁵ The Woman's Club successfully pushed for legislation requiring compulsory education for the children of Chicago as well as education and work for the blind.

Although Bertha contributed to many different committees, her fundamental interest was in the education and protection of women and children. In the late 1880s the men of Chicago tried, but failed, to raise enough money to form an industrial school where homeless boys could learn a skill. The CWC took over the fund-raising efforts. Bertha arranged for a musicale and art exhibit in her home and raised fifteen-hundred dollars for the proposed school.³⁰⁶ Within three months the Woman's Club raised more

³⁰³William Hard, *Chicago Women as Citizens* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1917) 369-375.

³⁰⁴Hard, 376.

³⁰⁵During this period, the children of women who had been arrested, and who were without fathers, were also detained with their mothers.

³⁰⁶Hard, 274.

than \$40,000 to build the Illinois Manual Training School.³⁰⁷ The school, designed as a residential and educational facility for homeless boys, also served as an adoption agency and succeeded in placing many of these boys into adoptive homes.

During her work with the Woman's Club, Bertha observed that many women lacked proper hygienic education and care, resulting in unnecessary illness for themselves and their children. Therefore, the CWC, pioneers in such work, undertook the task of establishing a series of books and lectures to help educate women about the importance of such issues.³⁰⁸ In 1893, Bertha also accepted the position as the Woman's Club chairman for any relief organization that might be needed in emergencies.³⁰⁹ The vast accomplishments of the CWC spanned thirty years and encompassed most of the progressive era. It was also in her work with the CWC that Bertha became concerned about the unsafe working conditions, and unequal treatment that female workers in Chicago were forced to endure.

Although many middle-class women in Chicago held only invisible careers and had little in common with the working class women they were trying to help, cooperation between the two classes developed.³¹⁰ Bertha arranged for her wealthy friends to come to her home and listen to the women who worked in Chicago's millinery factories speak

³⁰⁷Frank, 115

³⁰⁸Weiman, 14-16.

³⁰⁹Hard, 117.

³¹⁰Dorothy and Carl Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York, Anchor Books, 1993) 62.

about their deplorable and unsafe working and living conditions. Angered by what she had seen in the factories and heard from the female workers, Bertha helped the women organize a strike against the factories. The strike led to the formation of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL). The WTUL faced many obstacles in gaining members. Women were unwilling, or unable, to spend their time away from the factories attending meetings. The meetings were held in the back of saloons or meeting halls that were as filthy as the factories in which the women worked.³¹¹ According to Sociologist Colette Hyman, the Chicago WTUL worked hard to secure "a nice place for the girls to meet in order to lure them to come."³¹² Bertha hoped that by becoming a member of the union she could encourage women to participate.

Palmer fought for legislation to investigate and control the sweatshops in Chicago factories.³¹³ She also held cooking classes in her home and gave young ladies, both from the factories and from upper-class homes, advice on how to run a home efficiently. Palmer not only encouraged all women who entered her home to start, or complete, an education, but she directed them to the schools where they might learn a trade and additional skills. Settlement houses such as Hull House also served as networks for women's activism, education, and protection.³¹⁴ The ability for women to find

³¹¹Woloch, 207, 209.

³¹²Colette A. Hyman, "Labor Organizing and Female Institution-Building: The Chicago Women's Trade Union League, 1904-24." *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*. Ed., Ruth Milkman (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) 23.

³¹³Ross, 47.

³¹⁴Hyman, 24.

employment, food, shelter, and a meeting place for their unions became a little easier with the opening of Hull House in 1889.³¹⁵

Through her membership in the Fortnightly and the CWC, Palmer met many feminist and social reformers of the time. Jane Addams, along with Ellen Starr, the founders of Hull House, were members of the Woman's Club.³¹⁶ In 1880 an estimated 3800 wage earning women lived apart from family and relatives in Chicago.³¹⁷ Most of these women were forced to work for meager wages and live in cramped quarters, if they had a home at all. Addams felt that "well-intentioned people like herself, who were the best hope of social reform, feel a 'fatal want of harmony between their theory and their lives, a lack of coordination between thought and action.'"³¹⁸ Hull House was located on South Halstead Street in a poor area of Chicago. Poor immigrants surrounded the area, as did poor non-immigrants beset by hard times.³¹⁹ By establishing a settlement in one of Chicago's decaying neighborhoods, Addams hoped to discover, and help to solve, the problems these women and other minorities faced.³²⁰ By establishing Hull House, a

³¹⁵Sklar, 172.

³¹⁶Allen Davis, *American Heroine; The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973)

³¹⁷Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 5.

³¹⁸Carl Smith, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 16.

³¹⁹Woloch, 260.

³²⁰Allen Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: Social Settlements and Progressive Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

social settlement that helped the poor and addressed the social problems created by Chicago's growing city, Addams and Starr hoped to provide educational and technical skills to help the underprivileged become self-supporting. Many other reformers were associated with Hull House, such as Florence Kelley and Julia Lathrop.³²¹

Florence Kelley, a Cornell graduate, joined Hull-House in 1891 and remained for seven years.³²² During that time she sought to secure the first factory inspection law, secured the establishment of the first juvenile court in Chicago, and persuaded the county to establish a juvenile court building and detention home.³²³ In 1893 Governor Altgeld appointed Kelley the first chief factory inspector in Illinois.³²⁴ In 1898 Kelley left Hull-House to head the National Consumers' League and remained active in reform movements.³²⁵ Active in many of the same reforms as Kelley, was Julia Lathrop.

Julia Lathrop was also college educated. After she attended Vassar, Lathrop arrived at Hull-House in 1889.³²⁶ During the twenty years she remained at Hull-House she gained prominence as President Taft's appointee to head the Children's Bureau. She also helped organize the Juvenile Court Committee, the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute,

³²¹Katharyn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nations' Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)

³²²Sklar, 171.

³²³Sklar, 213..

³²⁴Sklar, 235-36.

³²⁵Sklar, 308-309.

³²⁶Woloch, 264.

and the Juvenile Protection Association, all concerned with the protection of children.³²⁷

Lathrop, Kelley, and Addams, needed the support, financial and vocal, of women like Bertha Palmer. By contributing financial support, and volunteering their time to places like Hull House, women of wealth, continued their "invisible careers."³²⁸

Addams received many donations for Hull House from wealthy members of the CWC. According to Addams biographer, Allen Davis, Addams was successful in raising so much money from her wealthy friends in Chicago, "because she was one of them."³²⁹ She needed to find donors "who were willing to contribute without regard to the money's use," and she did find them.³³⁰ After visiting Hull House, Bertha Palmer not only provided financial support for Addams, but became a member of the Board of Directors. Although Palmer and Addams became lifelong friends, differing political views threatened their friendship more than once.

Bertha, an advocate of equality and civil rights, was also extremely loyal to the United States. When Addams reportedly met with anarchists at Hull House, Palmer stopped speaking to her and pulled her financial support from Hull House for a short

³²⁷Wheeler, 74-75, 112-113.

³²⁸Kathleen McCarthy, *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) ix.

³²⁹Davis, 106.

³³⁰Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Who Funded Hull House?" *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women Philanthropy, and Power*. Ed., Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 94.

time.³³¹ Addams, as strong-willed as Bertha, felt that even anarchists had a right to be heard. Also, given the corruption that Addams had personally witnessed and encountered in Chicago's political system, some of the principles the anarchists believed made sense to her. Still, despite their differences, Palmer and Addams remained friends until Palmer died, and Addams was a frequent visitor to the Palmers' home in Chicago and at their summer home in Maine.³³²

Palmer's strong support of the education of women, her work with the Charity Ball, and the CWC, led to her work with the Civic Federation of Chicago. The social reforms brought about by the Civic Federation, of which Bertha Palmer was the first vice-president, were as important to Chicago as those achieved by the Woman's Club.

In 1893 noted British editor, William T. Snead, came to Chicago to visit the Exposition. Although the Columbian Exposition impressed Snead, the filth, poverty, and overcrowding that existed beyond the "White City" shocked him.³³³ During the Exposition, Snead gave a two-day speech that he later turned into an exposé about Chicago entitled "If Christ Came to Chicago."³³⁴ Snead visited both Bertha Palmer and Jane Addams while he was in Chicago, urging them to take immediate action to help

³³¹Wheeler, 66.

³³²Ross, 115.

³³³One of the reasons the Exposition was nicknamed the "White City" because every building was painted white due to cost considerations and the time constraints. The Exposition was also called the "White City" by blacks who were excluded in the planning and in full participation in the Fair.

³³⁴William T. Snead was killed when the ship Titanic sank in 1912.

those people who were at the mercy of the industrial giants.³³⁵ According to historian Sean Cushman, Chicago epitomized the industrial metropolis that superseded the big city of the Gilded Age. Cushman describes the industrial metropolis as “the city of the mechanized factory, the business corporations, the downtown office, and the segregated neighborhood,” which was an accurate description of Chicago in the last half of the nineteenth century.³³⁶

In Chicago, the Polish, Irish, Germans, and other immigrants lived in segregated areas. Overcrowding occurred in all immigrant neighborhoods and three or four families lived in a two-room apartment. In another part of Chicago seventy-three-hundred children lived within a three-block radius. Some parts of Chicago housed three times as many people as the most crowded parts of Tokyo and Calcutta.³³⁷ The national economic crisis that developed in the United States in 1893 also added to the deteriorating living conditions for Chicago’s working poor. Several prominent citizens organized a meeting to address the city’s social evils, and economic concerns, that plagued the city. The result of the meeting was the organization called the Civic Federation.

The first meeting of the Civic Federation of Chicago was held February 15, 1894, at the Palmer House Hotel. What made the Civic Federation of Chicago a unique organization for its time is that a male and a female member occupied the two highest

³³⁵“The Civic Federation Library.” Online. <http://www.mcs.net/electriclibrary/history> 30 March 1997.
³³⁶“The Civic Federation still functions as an active organization in Chicago today.”
³³⁷“The Civic Federation’s committees included: Philanthropic, Moral, Industrial, Educational, Political, and Municipal.”

³³⁶Sean D. Cushman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1974) 115.

³³⁷Cushman, 122-123.

positions. Lyman Gage, the well-known and respected president of the First National Bank of Chicago became the president of the Federation. Bertha Palmer was selected as the Civic Federation's first vice-president, and Jane Addams was appointed as a trustee of the Federation. The Federation's goal was "to make Chicago the best governed, the healthiest, and the cleanest city in this country."³³⁸ This organization, divided into six committees much like the CWC, initially attacked government waste and corruption, and worked to shut down gambling houses that were extorting large amounts of money each month from local businesses.³³⁹ The Civic Federation's Municipal Committee pushed the leaders of Chicago to pass the first civil service law.³⁴⁰ The members of this organization also campaigned for clean streets, pressured officials to arrest corrupt garbage collectors, and alerted the public to the dangers of giving unsafe food to babies. To enlighten voters, and in an attempt to decrease the number of corrupt politicians, the Civic Federation made the public aware of the blemished records of some of Chicago's political candidates.³⁴¹ Under the direction of Bertha Palmer, the Civic Federation organized relief operations during the economically depressed days that followed the exposition. In her role as the vice-president, Bertha also acted as a mediator during the Pullman Strike.

³³⁸"The Civic Federation History." Online. www.mcs.com/~civicfed/history. 30 March 1997. The Civic Federation still functions as an active organization in Chicago today.

³³⁹The Civic Federation's committees included: Philanthropic, Moral, Industrial, Educational, Political, and Municipal.

³⁴⁰Weiman, 594.

³⁴¹Civic Federation Online. 2.

Bertha In 1894, George Pullman, Chicago railroad magnate, and developer of his own model city, full of his workers and their nearly identical homes, added to an already troubled city by his own greed. Pullman, a long time friend of the Palmers, reduced wages in his model town by 25 percent, but kept his rents and other charges at the same level.³⁴² In retaliation, Eugene V. Debs, president of the American Railway Union and a friend of Bertha's, led a strike that began May 11, 1894.³⁴³

On behalf of the Civic Federation, Lyman Gage and Bertha Palmer met with Pullman. Bertha, acting as the mediator between her two friends, Pullman and Debs, could not get Pullman to meet with Debs, or members of the Union.³⁴⁴ Bertha felt that the least Pullman could do was talk to his workers and listen to their complaints. Ultimately, Pullman refused to listen to anyone tell him how to run his business and declined any form of arbitration. On July 4, 1894, over the protest of Illinois Governor Altgeld, President Grover Cleveland ordered twenty-five hundred federal troops to Chicago. The strike ended within a week, but most of the glorious reminders of the great "White City" came to a fiery end when arsonists destroyed most of the buildings that remained after the Exposition.

Although Bertha could not settle the Pullman Strike, her position within the Civic Federation spoke loudly of the way the men and women of Chicago, thought of her.

³⁴²Skip Whitson, *Illinois: One-Hundred Years Ago* (Albuquerque: Sun Publishing Company, 1976) 25-40.

³⁴³Leon Stein, ed., *The Pullman Strike: American Labor From Conspiracy to Collective Bargaining* (New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969)

³⁴⁴Ross, 106.

Bertha Palmer was able to accomplish so much as a woman's advocate because she was Bertha Palmer. The social position she held, her accomplishments during the 1893 Exposition, and her position in the Civic Federation, allowed Bertha to do almost whatever she wanted. Few people were going to tell Bertha that her intentions, actions, or methods were wrong. Bertha's upper-class status, her role as the grand dame of Chicago's high society, and her desire to do something for those unable to fight for themselves, made her goals easier to attain. Throughout her work as a woman's advocate, Bertha Palmer continued to maintain a high profile in Chicago's high society. Bertha knew that in order to keep her position as Chicago's grande dame, organizing and attending social events was required.

Henry Hamilton Honore, father
of Mrs. Potter Palmer. (Engraving,
courtesy Chicago Historical Soci-
ety)





Mrs. Henry Hamilton Honoré,
mother of Mrs. Potter Palmer. (Por-
trait by J. C. Gorman. Courtesy of
Major General Ulysses S. Grant III.
Frick Art Reference Library)

Henry Hamilton Honoré, father
of Mrs. Potter Palmer. (Engraving,
courtesy Chicago Historical Soci-
ety)



Young Bertha Mallida Honoré



Young Bertha Matilda Honoré. (Chicago Historical Society)



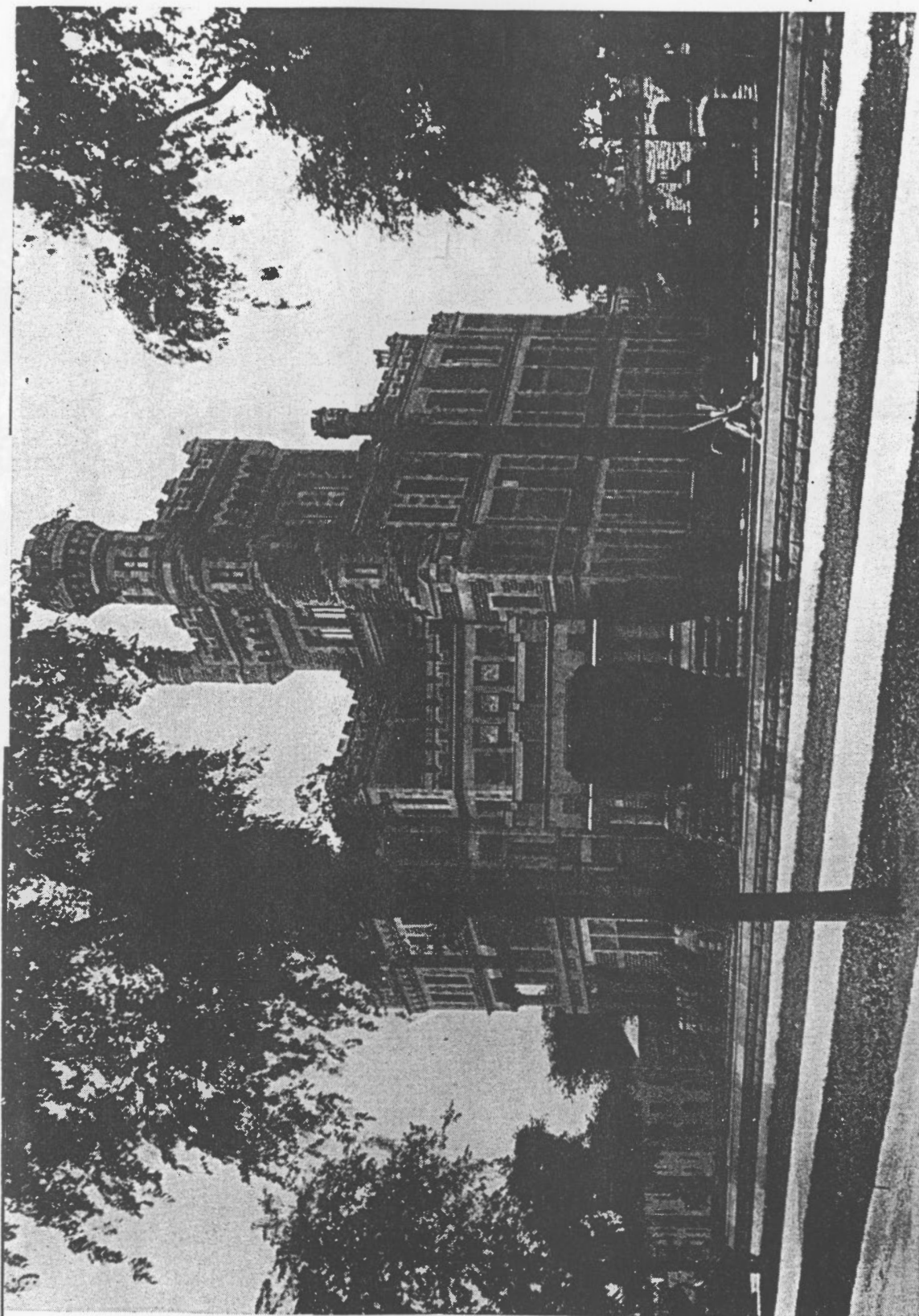
Potter Palmer in 1868.
(By John Carbutt, Chicago
Historical Society)

Potter Palmer.
(By Steffins, Chicago
Historical Society)

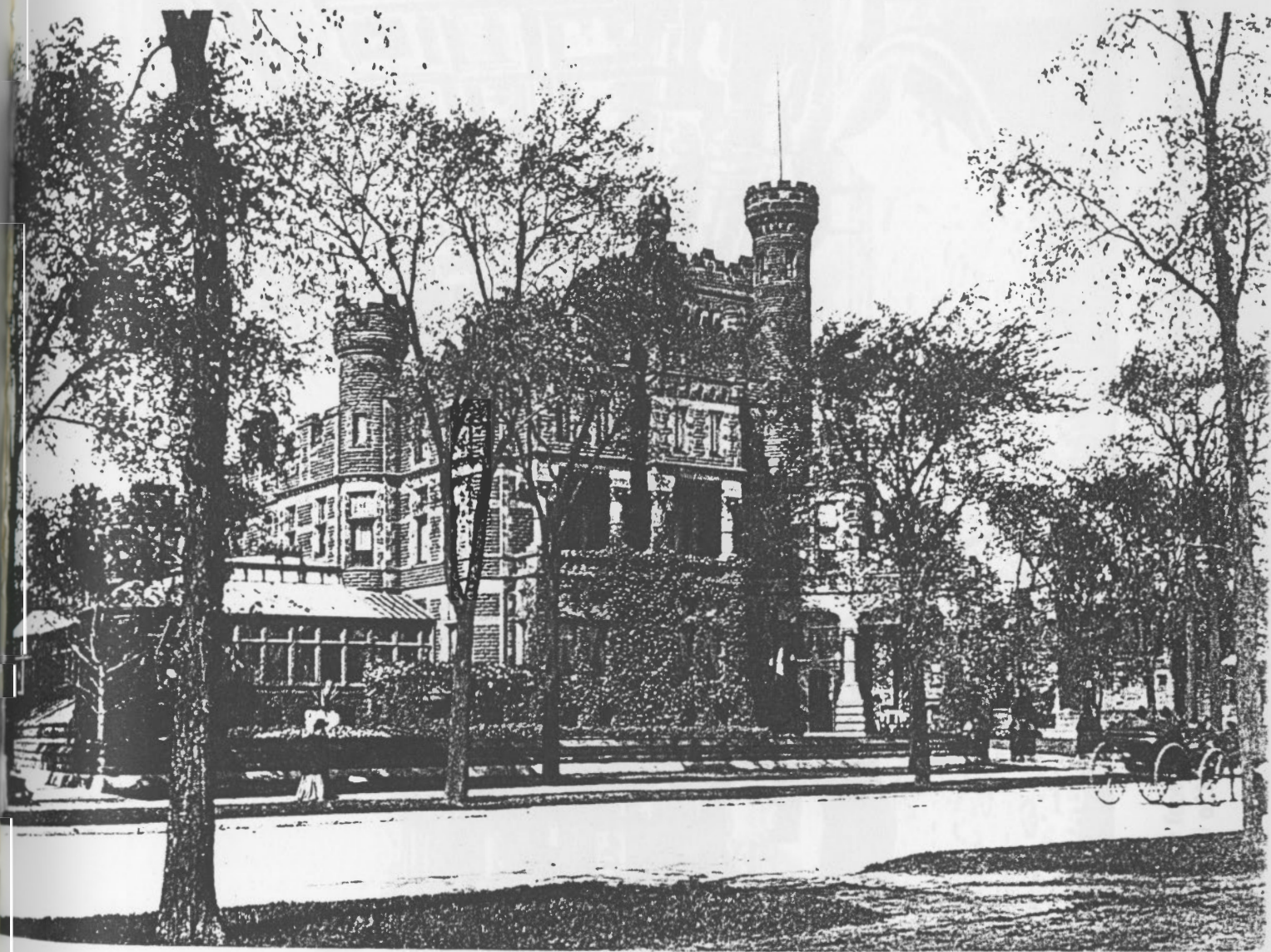




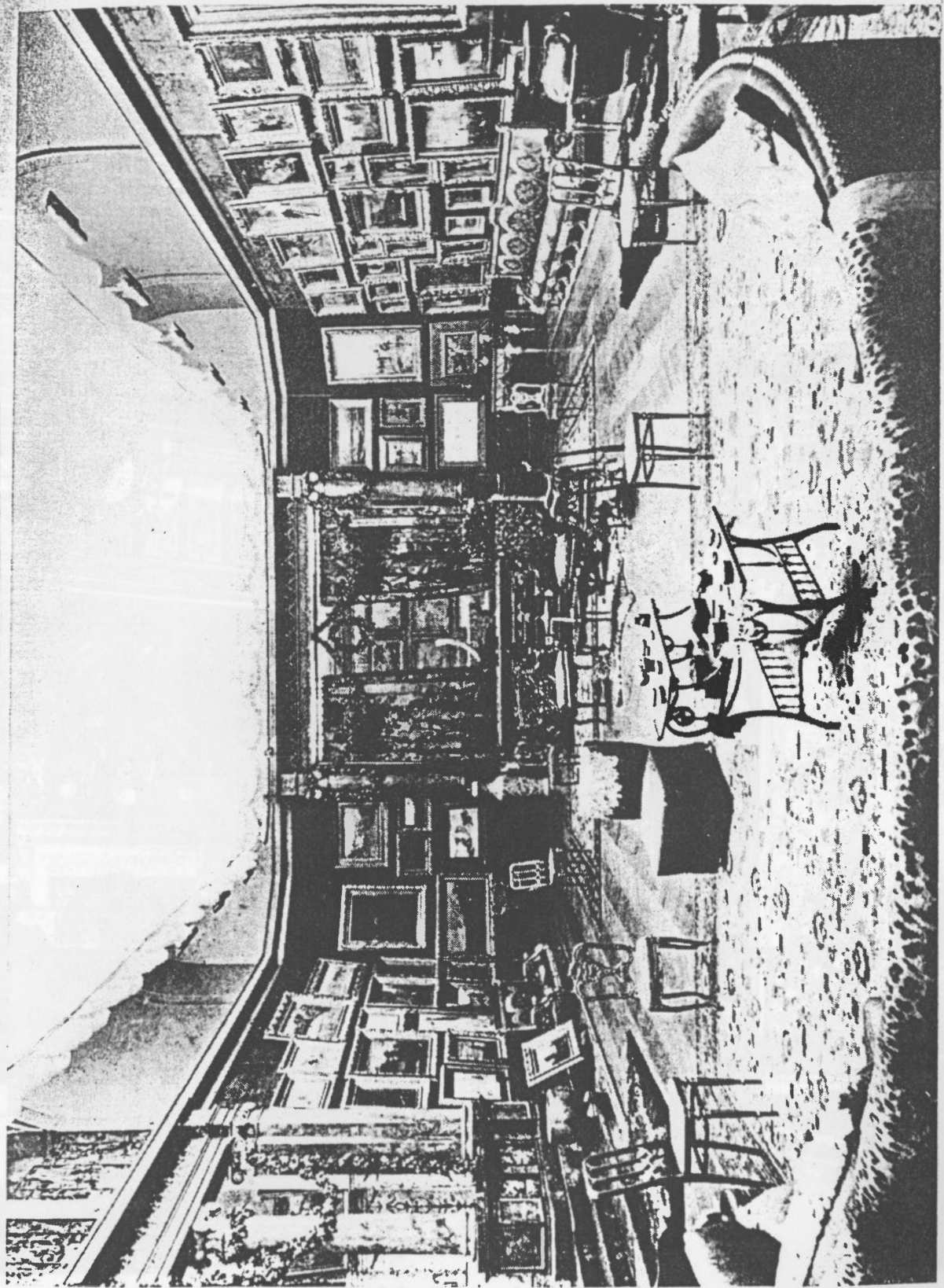
The second Palmer House Hotel, completed in 1875. (The Fred Townsend Collection)



An 1890 view of the Palmer home on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, five years after its completion.
(Chicago Historical Society)



View of the Palmer home as it stood until 1950 when it was torn down to make way for high-rise apartments.



View of the seventy-five foot long picture gallery/ballroom where Bertha Palmer hung her Impressionist paintings and held many of her receptions.



The central hall of the Palmer home in Chicago.

Top: The Children's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.
Bottom: The Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.



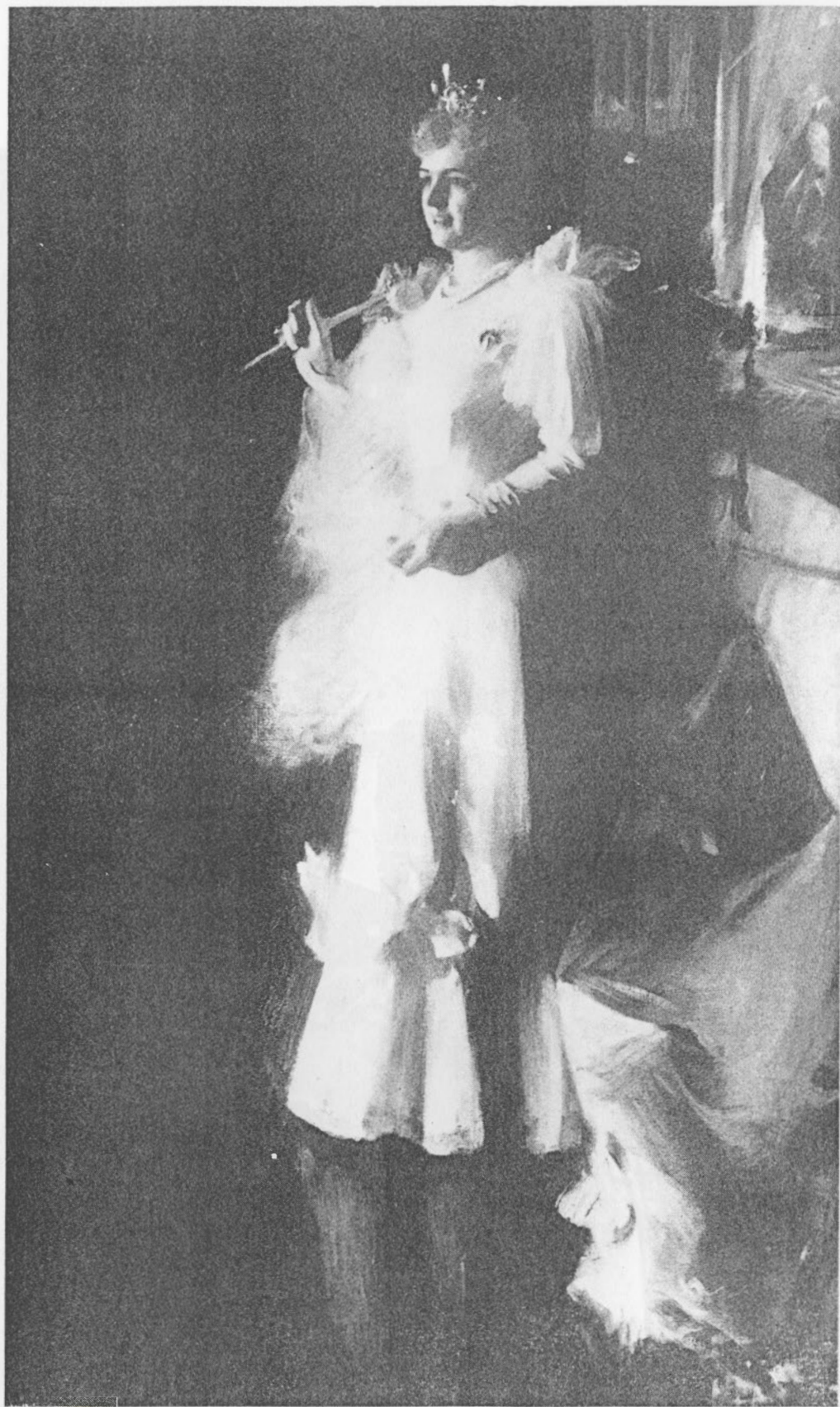
Mrs. Potter Palmer in 1893, as chairman of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Exposition. (The Art Institute of Chicago)

Top: The Children's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.
Bottom: The Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.



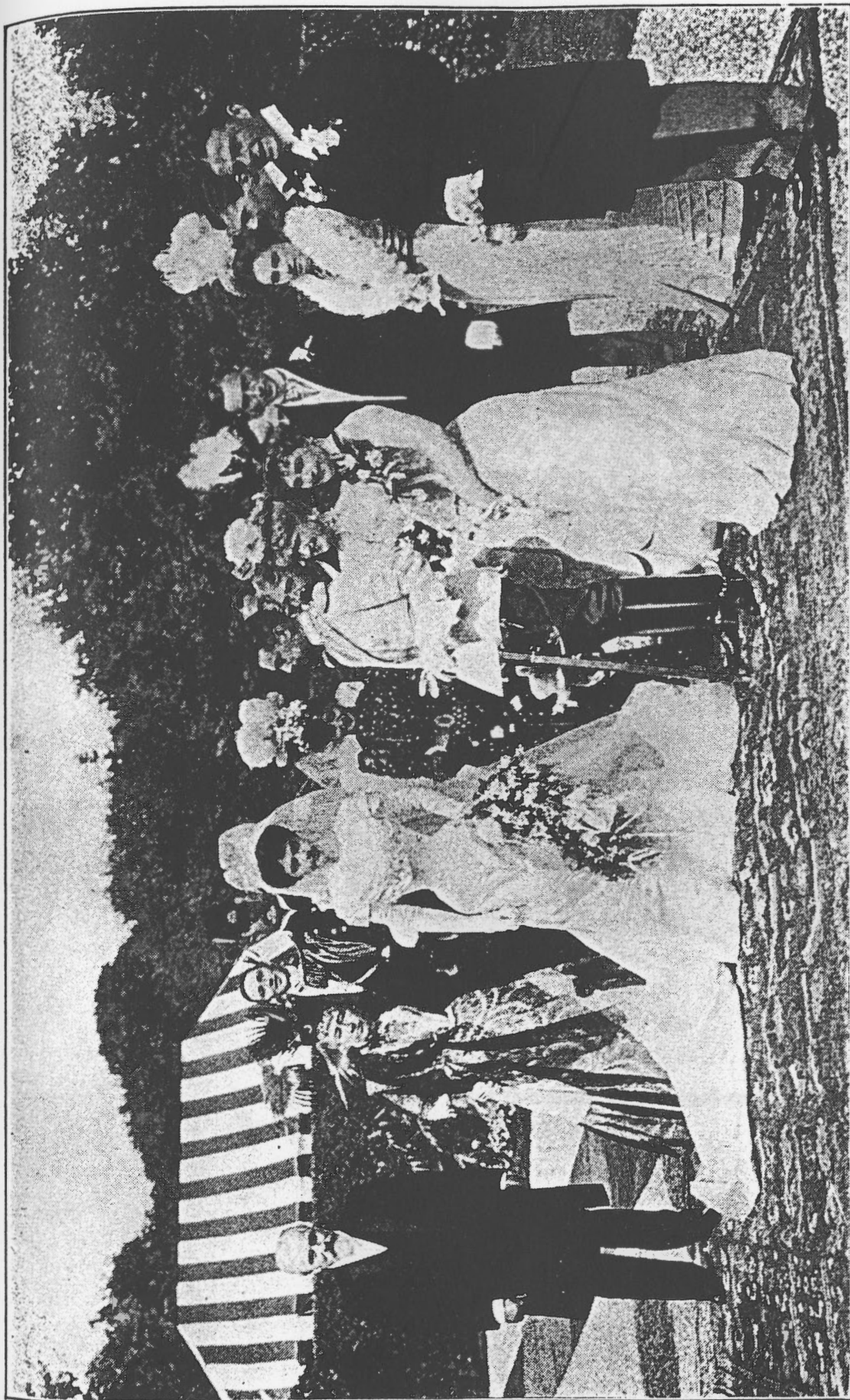
The center panel of Mary Cassatt's mural "Modern Woman." (1893)





Mrs. Potter Palmer. (Portrait by Anders Leonard Zorn. Potter Palmer Collection, Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)

111; the bride, Julia Grant; the bride's mother Mrs. Ida Grant; the groom, Prince Michael Cantacuzene; next to the Prince, Mrs. Bertha Palmer. Some unidentified members of the wedding party included Julia's cousin, Potter Palmer II, and Honoré Palmer, and her grandmother, Mrs. Thayer S. Grant. (1877)



PART OF THE CANTACUZÈNE WEDDING PARTY AT NEWPORT.

The bride's grandfather, Mr. Henry Honoré, far left; third from left, Julia Grant's brother, Ulysses S. Grant III; the bride, Julia Grant; the bride's mother Mrs. Ida Grant; the groom, Prince Michael Cantacuzène; next to the Prince, Mrs. Bertha Palmer. Some unidentified members of the wedding party included Julia's cousins, Potter Palmer II, and Honoré Palmer, and her grandmother, Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant. (1899)



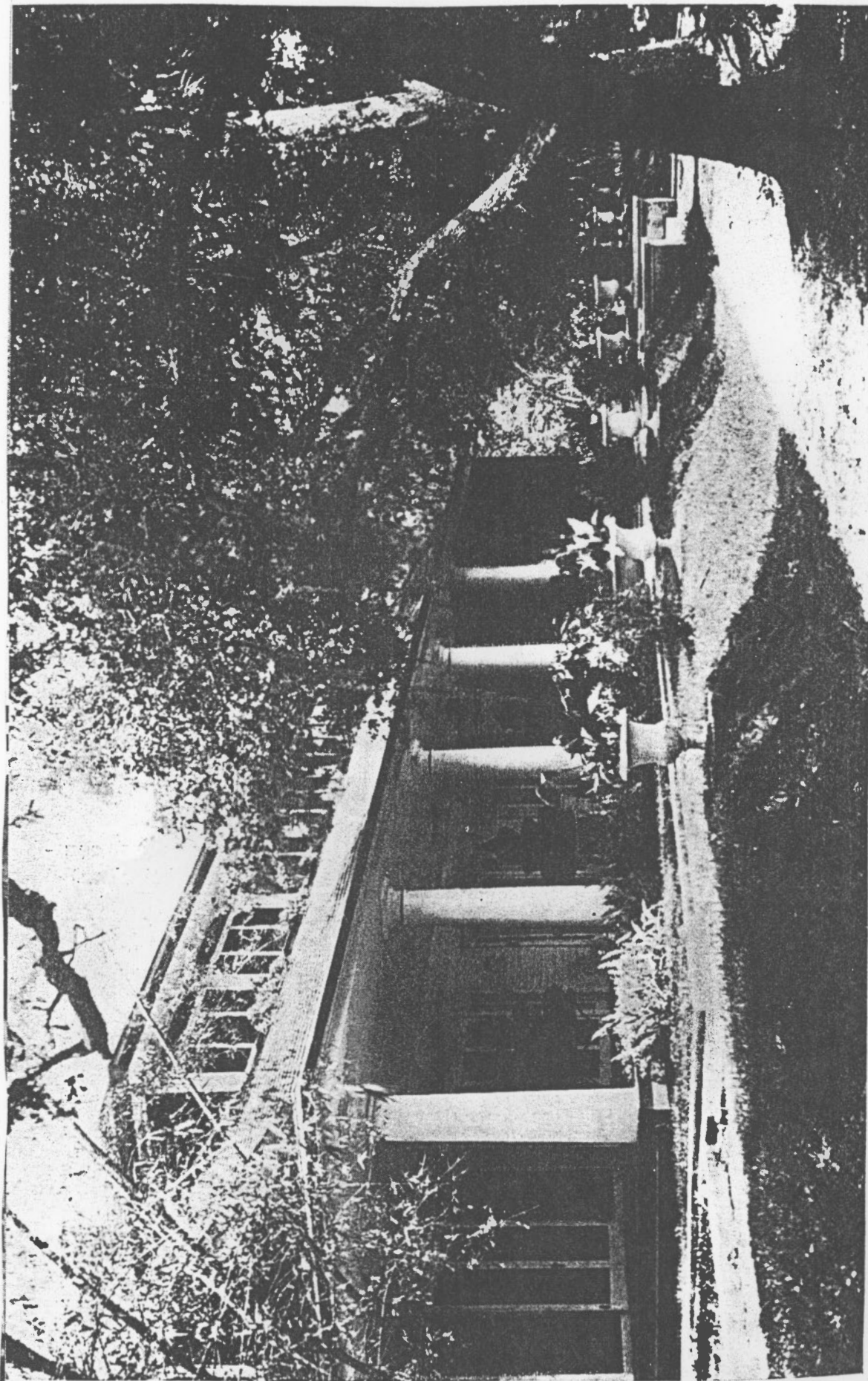
Mrs. Palmer wearing her favorite pearl necklace and pink pearl pendant. (Chicago Historical Society)

**Mrs. Palmer shortly after the death of her husband in 1902.
(By Steffins, Chicago Historical Society)**



Mrs. Palmer wearing her favorite pearl necklace and pink pearl pendant. (Chicago Historical Society)

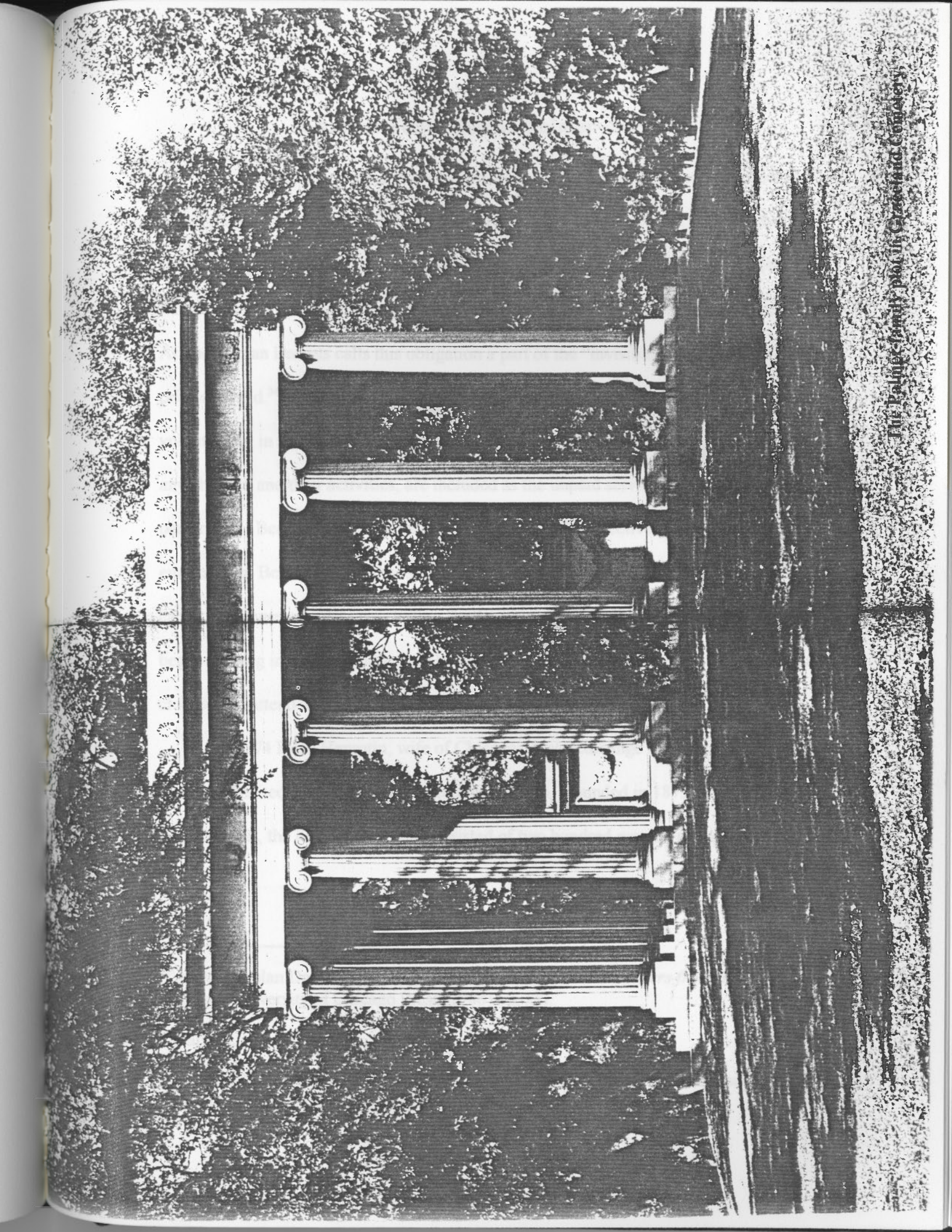
The Oak-Mrs. Palmer's Copy, Photo from
(Chicago Historical Society)



The Oaks--Mrs. Palmer's Osprey, Florida home.
(Chicago Historical Society)



Mrs. Potter Palmer after her move to Sarasota.



The Palmer family plot in Graceland Cemetery

Chapter Four: Bertha Palmer~Socialite

In the late nineteenth century Bertha Palmer was to Chicago's social schedule, what Al Capone was to the city's illegal activities-- in control. Bertha believed that entertaining was as much a part of business as running a hotel. As the wife of Potter Palmer, Bertha felt it was her obligation to entertain her husband's business associates. Arlene Kaplan Daniels calls this obligation a part of the "invisible career" that women of privilege held.³⁴⁵ These unpaid duties included more than entertaining. Club work, volunteering in social and civic organizations, running the household, and supervising any children and their activities, are included as the unpaid services women of privilege performed. Bertha Palmer carried out her unpaid duties effectively and efficiently. By entertaining, Bertha fulfilled her social, civic, and professional obligations, her invisible career.³⁴⁶ However, nine years before Bertha moved into her Lake Shore home, she began moving into the public sphere by participating in Chicago's social clubs. The first club Bertha attended was the Fortnightly Club.³⁴⁷

In 1874 Ellen Henrotin, wife of Chicago Stock Exchange President, Charles Henrotin, invited Bertha to join the Fortnightly Club. Founded in 1873 by Chicagoan, Kate Doggett, the Fortnightly Club consisted of two hundred women of wealth and was

³⁴⁵Arlene Kaplan Daniels in *Invisible Careers: Women Civil Leaders from the Volunteer World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) xx, xxi.

³⁴⁶Daniels, ix.

³⁴⁷Because Bertha Palmer's activities in many of the clubs listed, and discussed, were pre-Exposition, the information used in this paper is the only material found.

the first literary association in Chicago.³⁴⁸ The Fortnightly, like many of the first women's clubs, was focused on self-improvement, although member, and feminist, Ellen Henrotin felt that Doggett initially started the Fortnightly Club to further the cause of suffrage.³⁴⁹

Bertha delayed becoming a registered member of the Fortnightly until 1880, when her sons did not require her attention full-time.³⁵⁰ Membership on women's clubs did more than provide a source of cultural enlightenment, "it taught women the value of their own autonomy."³⁵¹ While gaining independence, women's clubs also allowed upper-class women, like Bertha, to gather together and to gain experience speaking before crowds. The members of the Fortnightly listened to speeches by Sara Hubbard, Julia Ward Howe, Jane Addams, and poet and publisher Harriet Monroe. Monroe wrote in her autobiography that the Fortnightly Club "gave me my first hearing as an essayist and at the club discussions I gradually compelled my shaking body to rise and speak in spite of a thumping heart and trembling voice."³⁵² Karen Blair, in her book *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*, explained how these types of clubs

³⁴⁸Beadle, 10.

³⁴⁹Lydia Hoyt Farmer, *What America Owes to Women* (Chicago: Chicago Wells Moulton, 1893) 371.

³⁵⁰Beadle, 43.

³⁵¹Blair, xiii.

³⁵²Beadle, 48.

helped women gain confidence to move into the public sphere. She wrote "A strong sense of sisterhood grew among these women, along with confidence, and skills in speaking, researching, and writing, which gave all a new sense of worth and enabled some members to move onto more political activity."³⁵³ Although Bertha Palmer possessed confidence and skills in speaking and writing, the Fortnightly Club gave her the opportunity to give her first speech.

As a part of the weekly addresses given by its membership, Palmer gave a speech entitled "The Obligations of Wealth," to the Fortnightly. In her speech Bertha addressed the responsibilities the wealthy had to help those less fortunate.³⁵⁴ At the time Bertha began speaking in public, neither she, nor those around her, had an idea that in the future her speeches would be heard by thousands, and recorded for history. Unfortunately, Bertha's first public speech was not recorded.

Bertha Palmer continued her move into the public sphere through her membership and support of many other women's clubs, which were generally restricted to women of the upper class.³⁵⁵ The popularity of social organizations for women had greatly increased in Chicago. In 1883 there were nine women's clubs and by 1887 there were more than eighteen.³⁵⁶ As Bertha strengthened her position as the queen of

³⁵³Blair, 58.

³⁵⁴Weiman, 13.

³⁵⁵Weiman, 13.

³⁵⁶Beadle, 51.

Chicago's high society, she joined and started other social clubs.

The ability to gather together and to discuss literature and art, was still usually restricted to higher class women. Middle and working class women, did not have the same amount of free time, money, or education, that Bertha's crowd did. While Bertha participated in civic organizations that crossed all economic and social classes, she still maintained her membership in elite organizations.

In 1887, Bertha became one of the founders of another club called the Friday Club, so named because they held their meetings on the first Friday of the month. Bertha and Ellen Henrotin recognized that the Fortnightly Club had not attracted many of the younger members of Chicago's society. The purpose of the Friday Club was to provide the young unmarried daughters of Chicago's "best" families with an opportunity to prepare and read papers on a variety of literary topics.³⁵⁷

Eventually young married women of Chicago's upper-class were allowed to join the Friday Club in order to, "lend a tone and supply paragons to the younger element."³⁵⁸ However, to increase its selectivity and appeal to the younger female members of Chicago's society, the Friday Club passed a resolution forbidding the young women of the Fortnightly to hold dual memberships in these clubs. This rule of course did not apply to Bertha Palmer, Ellen Henrotin or Mrs. A.L. Chetlain, the founders of the Friday

³⁵⁷Susan Dart, ed, *The Friday Club: The First Hundred Years* (Chicago: The Friday Club, 1987) 10.

³⁵⁸Beadle, 48.

Club, who held dual membership in Fortnightly and the Friday Club. Generally, this act was unnecessary as the younger women of the Friday Club considered the members of the Fortnightly to be "stuffy."³⁵⁹ Leaders of The Friday Club encouraged its members to read various types of literature and later discuss their readings with other members. Like the Fortnightly, the young women of the Friday Club were well educated. According to Susan Dart, the reading the women did, "would put many of us to shame today. They read widely not only in English, but often in French and German as well."³⁶⁰

Encouraging younger members to continue and expand their education was one of the functions of the Friday Club. Each month different lectures were given and in 1887 Bertha read a paper to the Friday Club called "Some Tendencies of Modern Luxury" which was believed to be a revision of her paper "The Obligations of Wealth," which she had read in 1876 to the Fortnightly, but is not documented as such.³⁶¹

By 1885, when the Palmers moved into their palatial home, Bertha Palmer was the unquestionable queen of Chicago's high society. Bertha's social schedule became Chicago's social schedule and other women usually waited to see what she had planned before announcing their own parties, meetings, or other affairs. Mary Maddox reported an occasion in which someone forgot to check Bertha's schedule.

Attending the tea of a fashionable organization, Maddox entered the room and

³⁵⁹Susan Dart, ed, *The Friday Club: The First Hundred Years*, 15.

³⁶⁰Dart, 10

³⁶¹Beadle, 48.

found four large tables stacked with food. Sitting together in the empty room were two elderly ladies. When questioned by Maddox where the rest of the ladies were, one of the ladies responded, "Mrs. Palmer didn't know this was the day of our tea and she issued cards for the same day."³⁶²

Bertha's life was a whirlwind of entertaining and accepting or declining the multitude of social invitations she received. Receiving an invitation to the Palmer home became a coveted item in Chicago's social circles. The CHS has a file containing a small portion of the many invitations Bertha received. On the back of these weddings invitations, christening announcements, and other social and political events, Bertha had simply written, "accept" or "decline." Although Bertha declined hundreds of offers to attend many social events, and to dine in the homes of other Chicago socialites, she usually attended the weddings of her servants. Many of her servants, generally of French descent, recalled with fondness that Bertha also sent cards and gifts after the birth of each of their children.³⁶³

Bertha entertained more than Chicago's elite in her home. She opened her home to labor leaders, social reformers, politicians, celebrities, and noted authors. Guests in the Palmer home included union leader and Socialist presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, Jane Addams, Susan B. Anthony, British writer and reformer, William T. Stead,

³⁶²Mary Maddox, *The Beautiful Woman: An Unusual Glimpse of Mrs. Palmer* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1909) 20.

³⁶³Maddox, 25.

United States presidents Grant, Harrison, and McKinley, the children of former presidents, Robert Todd Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant Jr., and authors such as Hamlin Garland and Sarah Hubbard.³⁶⁴ Bertha Palmer also became known as *the* hostess of Chicago's annual Charity Ball. It is doubtful that Bertha Palmer considered all of the planning and expense that it took to hold these annual balls as work; it was simply a part of her invisible career.³⁶⁵

The Charity Ball became Chicago's first important public social event in 1870, when tickets sold for twenty dollars apiece.³⁶⁶ However, after 1887 it became a function directly associated with Bertha Palmer. As with many functions in her life, Bertha fulfilled both her social and philanthropic obligation by hosting the Charity Ball. Hosting the Ball gave Bertha the opportunity to entertain her friends while raising money for many of Chicago's charities. Under Bertha's direction the Ball became Chicago's premier annual social event. The Ball was usually held in late January or early February. Each year different charitable organizations received the proceeds of the Ball.

In 1896, Provident Hospital in Chicago received a share of the Charity Ball's proceeds.³⁶⁷ According to Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Provident Hospital was founded and

³⁶⁴Hubbard later became the literary editor of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper.

³⁶⁵Daniels, xxi.

³⁶⁶Ross, 28.

³⁶⁷J. F. Madden, Treasure, Provident Hospital to Mrs. Potter Palmer, March 6, 1896. Private papers of Mrs. Potter Palmer, CHS.

staffed by blacks after they were refused treatment in Chicago's other hospitals.³⁶⁸ The Charity Ball was held, under the direction of Bertha Palmer, every year until she died.³⁶⁹ While Bertha had reached the top of the social ladder in Chicago, it was just Chicago. In 1895 Bertha began her quest to gain acceptance into the tight-knit circles at Newport, Rhode Island.

The "four hundred" of the east coast originally snubbed Bertha Palmer. The Palmers, with a net worth of *only* eight million dollars, were considered as mere paupers when compared to the Astors and Vanderbilts.³⁷⁰ Bertha eventually won acceptance in the elite Newport social set after she had entertained many distinguished royals of Europe, including Prince Albert of Belgium, Prince Turin of Italy, Queen Margherita's nephew, and Prince Michael of Russia.³⁷¹ Bertha's desire, and ability, to gain acceptance within Newport's society, provided one of the last social hurdles that she conquered. For five seasons Bertha entertained, and was entertained by, the cream of Newport's social elite.³⁷² The wedding of her niece Julia to Prince Michael forced the Newport aristocrats to call Bertha for an invitation to the social event of the year.

³⁶⁸Trudie Harris, *Selected Works of Ida B. Well-Barnett* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 107.

³⁶⁹McKenna, 37.

³⁷⁰The "four-hundred" referred to the elite list of guests that would be invited, and that would fit, into the ballroom of the Astor's New York Mansion.

³⁷¹Ross, 132-134.

³⁷²Ross, 136.

Julia's travels abroad with the Palmers brought her into contact with many of Europe's rulers. In 1896 Julia met crowned Prince Michael Cantacuzène of Russia while the Palmers attended the coronation of Czar Nicholas II.³⁷³ The relationship that developed on this trip between Prince Michael Cantacuzène and Julia continued to grow and within two years Julia and Prince Michael announced their engagement.³⁷⁴

Immediately after the announcement of the engagement, accusations flew that Bertha had finally succeeded in promoting an international marriage. However, Julia quickly came to her aunt's defense. In a statement Julia said, "I found in her a true friend whose advice was easy to follow as it coincided with my own idea of what was right. I was grateful that in spite of our small means I was not pushed into a 'brilliant match.'"³⁷⁵

Without delay Bertha began planning Julia's wedding. For political and religious reasons, they could not hold the Grant and Cantacuzène wedding until late September. In 1899, at the Astor villa, Beaulieu, in Newport, which Bertha had rented for the summer, Julia Grant became the first Chicagoan to marry royalty.³⁷⁶ The Palmers received a special dispensation from Russia to hold the ceremony in the United States, and in a private home. With only the immediate family allowed to attend the private Russian

³⁷³Cantacuzène, 145.

³⁷⁴There are links between Prince Michael's family and the Romanoff family of Russia. Julia Cantacuzène wrote a book about the Romanoff's in 1919 entitled: *Revolutionary Days: Recollections of the Romanoff's and Bolsheviks*.

³⁷⁵Ross, 142.

³⁷⁶Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *Chicago Confidential* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950) 122.

ceremony, Bertha held the crown of Russia over Prince Michael's head, and her son Honoré, held the other crown over his cousin's head.³⁷⁷ Julia's father, serving with the Army in the Philippines could not attend either the private service or the lavish receptions held the following day.³⁷⁸ Ida Grant knew she could never provide the kind of wedding that her daughter's marriage to a crowned prince would entail. Although Julia's mother attended the wedding, she allowed her sister, Bertha to run the social event of the season, for the sake of her daughter.³⁷⁹ After Bertha gained the acceptance she desired in Newport, sources noted that she did not return to Newport after 1900.³⁸⁰

The travels that had brought Julia and Prince Michael together were a part of the European trips the Palmers usually took annually. Before and after the Exposition the Palmers traveled to many foreign, and exotic, accompanied by their children and Julia, whenever possible. Trips to London, Paris, the Mediterranean, and Rome were a part of the Palmers' lifestyle. During a trip in 1896, Bertha obtained a private audience with Pope Leo XIII.³⁸¹

The Palmers were in Rome for a vacation with their sons and Julia. While there, Bertha had received tickets required to attend mass in the Sistine Chapel. Julia Grant noted in her autobiography, the Pope had not been well and "was then very old and had

³⁷⁷See illustrations for a picture of the Grant and Cantacuzène wedding.

³⁷⁸Ross, 142.

³⁷⁹Ross, 141.

³⁸⁰Cantacuzène, 186.

³⁸¹Ross, 111.

not for some time appeared at any function.³⁸² The facts that the Pope had not been seeing many people, privately or publicly for sometime, that Bertha Palmer was an Episcopalian, and that she still received a private audience was quite a feat, even for Bertha Palmer. An article in the Potter Palmer papers at the CHS described the papal meeting in detail. The article said:

Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer have been received by the Pope in a private audience an honor only granted to the high and mighty of the earth, being Protestants. His holiness asked many questions about America in general, and the educational question in particular. He seemed to take a keen interest in the latter subject and his remarks were highly complimentary to the American Nation. He spoke chiefly to Mrs. Palmer, as Mr. Palmer does not speak French and his holiness does not speak English. Mr. and Mrs. Palmer subsequently visited the Vatican gardens, another privilege rarely granted to strangers.³⁸³

Bertha Palmer had accomplished nearly every social agenda she had set for herself.

Denied the right to hold political office, Bertha did receive an appointment by the United States Government, in 1900.

Although she represented the United States unofficially in 1893, in 1900 Bertha Palmer was the only woman appointed by President McKinley as member of the National Commission representing the United States at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Bertha took Paris by storm, just as Jacqueline Kennedy did in 1961. While Bertha did not have the power she possessed in the 1893 Exposition, she still captivated the French people and managed to make her presence known to all.

³⁸²Cantacuzène, 194.

³⁸³Unidentified newspaper clipping,, unknown author, Potter Palmer file, CHS.

Before leaving for Paris, Palmer managed to have her good friend Jane Addams appointed to a position on the panel that oversaw the Department of Philanthropy, an appointment that the French directors had initially opposed.³⁸⁴ Just as she had in 1893, Bertha also succeeded in placing women on important committees, such as the award juries. Remembered by many as the official hostess of the 1893 Exposition, Palmer fulfilled her current position with her customary grace. Yet, not everyone was happy with the role Palmer had in Paris or that, once again, Bertha Palmer was in the international spotlight.

After Potter and Bertha arrived in Paris, some of the women who had worked with Bertha during the Columbian Exposition began to voice additional negative comments about Bertha and the tremendous amount of publicity she received as the Board's President. A few of Bertha's former friends said that she had been far too visible, too willing to take the credit, and too autocratic in many of her dealings. Bertha's critics felt that her interest in both the 1893 and 1900 Expositions only mirrored her efforts to maintain, or expand, her social position. While Bertha's role in the 1893 Exposition certainly enhanced her social position, she did not control the Board's nominating or voting process. The tremendous job Bertha did for Chicago seven years earlier, also added to her desirability as a representative of the United States to Paris, in 1900. Nevertheless, that did not stop some women from making their feelings about Bertha clear.

³⁸⁴Weiman, 594.

Mrs. Ferdinand Peck, wife of the official head of the American Commission to Paris, led an open campaign to restrict Bertha's power and publicity. Peck's husband publically stated that he would not let Bertha, an honorary commissioner, precede him, or his wife, in any social functions connected with the Paris Exposition.³⁸⁵ Although the Peck's were upset with Bertha's Paris position, Mary Logan, a former friend, was far angrier.

Mary Logan had been a friend of Bertha's until a series of events turned her into an avowed enemy. After Palmer received accolades for her work with the 1893 Exposition, Logan began to regret declining the suffragists' nomination as the BLM president. While Logan publicly pledged to help and support Palmer, as work continued during the planning of the Chicago Exposition, she became one of Bertha's most vocal opponents. In a letter to Bertha, Logan wrote, "the cause of women has been set back a generation since the opening of the World's Fair by the actions of unworthy members of our Board."³⁸⁶ Mary also made it clear to Bertha that only those Board members who hoped to remain in Chicago at the Boards' expense lavished her with excessive praised.³⁸⁷ According to historian Ishbel Ross, Palmer's Paris appointment so enraged Logan that she literally "fired a gun point-blank into the Commissions headquarters, charging that Mrs. Palmer had snubbed her and that she catered to the French at the

³⁸⁵Ross, 166.

³⁸⁶Ross, 93.

³⁸⁷Ross, 94.

New buildings that seemed to touch the sky were beginning to overtake the city. Cable cars had disappeared and elevated trains appeared. Bertha's sons were now grown and needed little from their mother. The only reminder of the 1893 Exposition was the Fine Arts Palace and the list of people who remembered Bertha's work for the Exposition had also diminished.

The role Bertha played as Chicago's grande dame left her little time, or perhaps little ability, to develop intimate relationships with the women she worked with or entertained. Although the fame, power, and money Bertha possessed did little to ease her feelings of loneliness and grief after Potter died, it did give her options. Escaping the pain associated with Chicago by traveling seemed the best option for Bertha, and travel she did.

A little over a month after Potter's death, Bertha planned to leave Chicago for an extended time. According to papers filed with the Collector of Customs in Chicago on June 14, 1902, Bertha listed the articles she would be taking with her on "a proposed journey abroad, where she will probably remain sometime."³⁹² The customs list declared winter and summer clothes, including twelve summer gowns, thirteen wool and crepe gowns, four suits, three coats, including one fur coat, five hats, and at least ten pieces of Bertha's jewelry. Prepared for any kind of weather and occasion, Bertha began traveling extensively for the next eight years.

³⁹¹Harrison, 11.

³⁹²Edward Sams, *The Dark Secrets of Queen Victoria*. Online. <http://www.cruisio.com/>

³⁹²Listed of articles declared by Mrs. Potter Palmer, June 14, 1902. Papers of Bertha Palmer, CHS.

One of Bertha's favorite cities was London, which she had visited yearly with Potter. While in London, Bertha often stayed at the castle with Queen Victoria.³⁹³ When Queen Victoria died in 1901, after a sixty-four-year reign, her son, the Prince of Wales, became King Edward VII. The new King had been a friend of the Palmers, visiting them in the United States several times before becoming king. Bertha took up residency in England, in the home that belonged to the Duke of Abercorn, called Hampden House.³⁹⁴ The King welcomed Bertha to England and treated her like royalty.

During Edwardian England, the castle came alive with music, parties, and people, in complete contrast to the rigid and somber reign of his mother, Queen Victoria.³⁹⁵ With garden parties at Windsor Castle, races at Ascot, and teas at Buckingham Palace, Bertha found stimulating conversation and laughter in England. The King enjoyed talking to Bertha, a woman who was well informed on current events, business, and international politics.³⁹⁶ The diplomatic skills and common sense Palmer possessed aided in her ability to walk in such royal circles. When her friends, and foes of the King, questioned Palmer about the reported affair between the King and Mrs. George Keppel, Bertha always responded, "Nobody ever saw her in any position where she could be

³⁹³Lait and Mortimer, 221.

³⁹⁴Harrison, 11.

³⁹⁵Edward Sams. *The Dark Secrets of Queen Victoria*. Online. [Http://www.cruzio.com/](http://www.cruzio.com/) 3 August 1997, 1-4.

³⁹⁶Witter, 27.

criticized."³⁹⁷ Bertha despised gossip, but she was also smart enough to remember that Edward was still the King and commenting on anything he did, or who he was with, particularly Keppel, would be foolish.³⁹⁸ Bertha's acceptance as a member of the King's inner circle meant that she had achieved the pinnacle of social acceptance.

After establishing herself in London, Bertha bought a home in Paris. Bertha's heritage, love of French art, and popularity after the 1900 Exposition, made finding a home in Paris a natural choice. Bertha chose a home at 6 Rue Fabert.³⁹⁹ Unlike the dark interior of the home that she had in Chicago, Bertha's Paris home was light and airy. Palmer found that the Impressionists' paintings that she brought with her to Paris looked even nicer against the white and gold walls of her new home.⁴⁰⁰

While Bertha traveled in Europe, Chicago newspapers kept the public informed of her activities. When noted Russian opera star, Fedor Chaliapin, gave a private performance for Bertha and a small group of her friends in her home in England, her Chicago followers knew it. In 1907, prima-ballerina Anna Pavlova danced at a reception Bertha gave for her son Honoré and his bride, Grace Greenway Brown of Boston.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷Ross, 194.

³⁹⁸According to "Britain's Famous Mistress Unlikely to be Queen" Infonet: Online: <http://www3.elibrary.com/id/> Keppel is the great-grandmother of Prince Charles' current mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles.

³⁹⁹Ross, 185.

⁴⁰⁰Ross, 186.

⁴⁰¹Ross, 210.

When the *Lusitania* attempted to break the speed record for crossing the Atlantic, on her maiden voyage, Bertha was among the 550 first class passengers.⁴⁰² Although the *Lusitania* failed to set the record, Chicagoans were informed about the trip thanks to daily updates wired to them by Bertha.⁴⁰³

Even with the glamour of England and France, Bertha was happiest when her sons and niece could join her in Europe. Motoring across France with her son's Honoré, Potter II, and Julia, Bertha would often stop at little inns and hotels. The name Potter Palmer was widely recognized in the hotel industry and Bertha never lacked top-notch service. In Europe, Bertha found friends, fun, and the ability to move freely in royal circles. Still, Bertha could not stop the political and personal changes that would occur in England and eventually the world.

In London in 1910 King Edward VII died of heart failure. Bertha quickly heard the news about the King and sent a letter of sympathy to Queen Alexandra, who had also become a friend of hers. Bertha was close enough to the King, his wife, and Mrs. Keppel, that she learned from the inner circles that in the King's last hours, the Queen led Mrs. Keppel by the hand to say good-bye to the King.⁴⁰⁴

In 1902, Bertha had left Chicago to escape from some of the pain she felt after the death of her husband. Now, after the death of King Edward, England no longer held the same attraction for Bertha. With many of the Palmers' business associates and

⁴⁰²Ross, 211.

⁴⁰³Harrison, 24.

⁴⁰⁴Ross, 219.

friends dead, Bertha found returning to Chicago for extended periods depressing. The city's appearance was rapidly changing as were the social customs and activities, and Bertha felt lost. The days of extravagant parties were coming to a close. Younger members of Chicago's social elite found fancy balls and teas cumbersome and a part of the past. Bertha's two daughters-in-law, were never seen wearing the number, or size, of jewels, that Bertha had worn, although they possessed such items.⁴⁰⁵ Bertha's diamond studded tiaras belonged to the Gilded Age, and she too, began to feel that she belonged to another time. However, it was during her return to Chicago during the winter of 1910, that Bertha found a new business, a new home in the United States, and a reason to live.

Bertha, her two sons, her father, and her brother Adrian, traveled to Florida in February of 1910. Arthur B. Edwards, a native of Sarasota, and Lord's partner, greeted Bertha and her family in Sarasota.⁴⁰⁶ Edwards was apprehensive about meeting Palmer, the well-known socialite who had dined with the kings and queens of Europe. However when he met Palmer he discovered she was "delightfully friendly and courteous, and instead of being scornful of Sarasota's situation, she called the town, 'refreshingly quiet.'"⁴⁰⁷ Edwards explained the history of Sarasota, which was in a period of transition, and

⁴⁰⁵Charles E. Haines, "Palmer's Party," *Florida Trend* June 1972: 140-150.

⁴⁰⁶Karl Brickie, *The Story of Sarasota* (Sarasota: Sarasota Historical Society, 1946) 155, CHS.

⁴⁰⁷Brickie, 157.

⁴⁰⁸Karl E. Grimmer, *The History of Sarasota: The History of the City and County of Sarasota* (Sarasota: M.E. Russell, 1946) 157.

⁴⁰⁵Maddox, 24.

Chapter Five: Bertha Palmer~Entrepreneur

To sixty-one year old Bertha, the winters in Chicago seemed to get colder and longer every time she returned. In January 1910, Bertha was reading the classified section of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* newspaper. Because Bertha had large real estate holdings in Chicago, she kept track of stocks, land for sale, and real estate transfers. An advertisement, placed by a real estate firm Bertha had used before, announced land for sale in sunny and warm Sarasota, Florida.

Bertha called the Chicago-based real-estate firm of *Lord and Edwards* for more information about the Florida advertisement.⁴⁰⁶ After hearing a description of the land, Palmer planned a trip to explore what the advertisement called “the richest land in the world.”⁴⁰⁷

Bertha, her two sons, her father, and her brother Adrian, traveled to Florida in February of 1910. Arthur B. Edwards, a native of Sarasota, and Lord’s partner, greeted Bertha and her family in Sarasota.⁴⁰⁸ Edwards was apprehensive about meeting Palmer, the well-know socialite who had dined with the kings and queens of Europe. However when he met Palmer he discovered she was “delightfully friendly and courteous, and instead of being scornful of Sarasota’s shabbiness, she called the town, ‘refreshingly quaint.’”⁴⁰⁹ Edwards explained the history of Sarasota, took Bertha on a guided tour of the community, and

⁴⁰⁶Charles E. Harner, “First a Panic, and Then a Lady Tycoon.” *Florida Trend* June 1972: 140-150.

⁴⁰⁷Karl Brickle, *The Story of Sarasota* (Unknown publisher, 1946) 155, CHS.

⁴⁰⁸Brickle, 157.

⁴⁰⁹Karl H. Grismer, *The Story of Sarasota: The History of the City and County of Sarasota, Florida* (Tampa: M.E. Russell, 1946) 157.

showed her the available land.⁴¹⁰ Bertha questioned Edwards about transportation, utilities, and available contractors. After answering each question Palmer asked, Edwards also explained the benefits of living in such an untapped and relatively unknown area. Although Bertha was very impressed with this small community of nine-hundred, she did not let Edwards know how excited she was, or let him pressure her into a decision.

As a daughter of a successful real estate developer, and the wife of Potter Palmer for thirty-two years, Bertha had watched, studied, and learned much about the real estate and business world. Palmer's social and civic duties had prepared her to deal with everyone from laborers to bankers, and she was not a woman who could be coerced, intimidated, or misled, by men in powerful positions. Bertha's own business transaction in the late 1880s demonstrated her own business insight and her ability to compete in the man's world of business.

Charles T. Yerkes was a Chicago businessman with a questionable reputation. Yerkes controlled some rail companies in which Bertha was a large stockholder. When Yerkes began buying large quantities of additional stocks, many of the other stockholders, distrusting Yerkes, sold out at once, but not Bertha. Bertha suspected that Yerkes was up to something, so she held her stock. Just as Palmer suspected, Yerkes ran the stocks up as high as he could. When the stock had reached its high point, Bertha sold her stock and made a generous profit.⁴¹¹ Bertha had learned well, watching her husband and father work, and just as she had been right about Yerkes, so were her feelings about Sarasota.

⁴¹⁰Edwards became Sarasota's first mayor in 1914. He died in 1969.

⁴¹¹"Obituary of Mrs. Potter Palmer." *Chicago Daily Tribune* 7 May 1918. Personal papers of Mrs. Potter Palmer in the CHS.

The city of Sarasota had faced hard times in the years before Bertha arrived. Land prices bottomed-out in 1909 and a four-room house, with a separate barn, on eight acres of cleared land, and seventy-two additional acres, could be purchased in Sarasota for just over \$1000.⁴¹² Bertha's purchase of land in Sarasota, caused the city to begin modernizing existing utilities and improving roads. Property prices continued to rise as other wealthy people from Chicago and the East began to purchase land for winter homes in the region. Ironically, just as fire had been Potter's nemesis, Bertha would face the same adversary in Florida.

In 1908, 1909, and in 1913, a series of fires came close to destroying Sarasota's downtown area. In 1914 the Dancy Block, a block of various business entirely owned by Bertha Palmer, was destroyed by fire.⁴¹³ As she had expected her husband to do thirty-three years earlier, Bertha rebuilt her lost buildings. Bertha Palmer's move to Sarasota was as important to its development, as her husband's had been to Chicago.

After viewing the property in Sarasota, Bertha bought the thirteen-acres that had belonged to Lawrence Jones in Osprey, Florida, on Little Sarasota Bay.⁴¹⁴ During the weeks following her initial purchase, Bertha became convinced she had found a real estate gold mine. Within a short time Palmer purchased 80,000 acres in the Sarasota region and thousands of additional acres in neighboring Hillsborough County. At one time Palmer owned more than 140,000 acres of Florida land. In explaining her large land purchases to

⁴¹²Grismer, 154.

⁴¹³Grismer, 176.

⁴¹⁴See illustrations for a picture of Palmer during her years in Florida.

Edwards, Bertha said, "You must realize that the Palmer family is quite an institution, the very foundation of the family is real estate. That is why we have invested so heavily in land down here."⁴¹⁵ At the age of sixty-one, Bertha decided to become a Florida land owner, gardener, citrus producer, and rancher.

The property Bertha purchased had been vacant a long time. Due to the dense overgrowth, paths had to be cut to create an entry to the home. Bertha began clearing the lawns, planting flowers, and restoring and adding to the former Jones home. However, recently discovered architectural plans show that Bertha had planned to build an opulent mansion where the home she called *The Oaks* stood.⁴¹⁶

The plans discovered show that Bertha planned to build a bay front manor that would have been the first of its kind in Florida. Architectural designs that Palmer had Chicago architect, Thomas Reed Martin, draw up were recently acquired by Wilson Stiles, director of the Sarasota Department of Historical Resources.⁴¹⁷ The plans, created in 1912, showed that Palmer planned to build an extravagant Italian Villa. Unfortunately, Bertha's house plans remained just that.⁴¹⁸

There are several theories as to why Bertha did not build the mansion Martin

⁴¹⁵Ross, 222.

⁴¹⁶See illustrations for a picture of Palmer's Florida home, *The Oaks*.

⁴¹⁷Dorothy Stockbridge, "Would Bertha Palmer's Home Look Like This." *Sarasota Herald Tribune* 12 April, 1992.

⁴¹⁸The design for Bertha's unbuilt home was similar to the opulent mansion *Villa Vizcaya* located in Miami, Florida, and built by fellow Chicagoan James Deering.

designed for her. One assumption is that Palmer wanted her gardens to be perfect before she began construction on a new home, but became too involved in her ranch and citrus farms to proceed. Another theory is that by the time her gardens were ready, Bertha discovered she was very ill.⁴¹⁹ The newly discovered plans show a home made entirely of stone that would have predated the stone villas built in Florida by John Ringling and by fellow Chicagoan John Deering. Unfortunately, Palmer's home, The Oaks, was a completely wooden structure that did not withstand the salt air and was destroyed in the late 1960s. Still, The Oaks, was anything but small or uncomfortable.

Bertha completely remodeled The Oaks. The four original first-floor rooms were turned into one large living room. Three additional wings were ultimately added and The Oaks increased in size to become a thirty-one-room home.⁴²⁰ The Oaks had a modern kitchen, full of the latest appliances and a walk-in pantry. Bertha's grandson, Gordon Palmer, Potter's son, lived in the home after Bertha died. His wife, Janis, recalled the kitchen being "as big as a skating rink."⁴²¹ The Oaks was equipped with modern bathrooms, both in the main home and in the many separate guest houses. Bertha had electricity installed in her home and in the gardens to illuminate the walkways and sitting areas. In describing her Sarasota home to her father Bertha said, "Here is heaven at last, it reminds

⁴¹⁹Stockbridge, 12.

⁴²⁰Linda Williams, *A Taste of History: Historic Spanish Point Cooking Then and Now* (Memphis: Wimmer, 1993) 54.

⁴²¹Williams, 52.

me of the Bay of Naples."⁴²²

Bertha's move to "unheard-of-Sarasota," and away from anyone important, puzzled her wealthy friends.⁴²³ For Palmer, Sarasota became a place to direct her energies, her talents, her money, and it became a profitable diversion from her loneliness.

Bertha wanted her Florida home to be more than just another Palmer mansion. Bertha planned for The Oaks to be a working ranch, complete with huge flower gardens and citrus orchards. Intent on actively participating in both the planning, planting, and everyday operations, Bertha devoured books on gardening, flowers, farming, cattle, landscaping, and the latest scientific and technological advances made in these areas. Plants and shrubs that were native to the region were brought to the Palmer home. Grass was grown at The Oaks and transplanted to other areas of Palmer's farm.

Bertha's wealth and position made it easier for her to have roads cleared and utilities improved. Although Bertha possessed the power to demand improvements, she did not have to resort to threats. She simply suggested, or asked, for things with the full knowledge that she could obtain her goals through her own means, if necessary. Bertha knew that any improvements made to the property surrounding and including her's also increased the desirability of the area for other would-be buyers. By accommodating Bertha, the standard of living for the citizens of Sarasota also improved. When the improvements to the roads and utilities were made, Bertha made her next land purchase.

⁴²²Ross, 226.

⁴²³Grismer, 159.

Bertha purchased thirteen hundred acres of fruit bearing orchards. Calling her citrus business the "Bee Ridge Development" Palmer dreamed of becoming the largest grapefruit producer in the world.⁴²⁴ While she failed to become the number one citrus grower in the world, she did ship her grapefruits to Chicago and other areas of the country, and her orchards were immediately profitable. Although Bertha enjoyed her citrus farm, her favorite part of The Oaks were *her* gardens.⁴²⁵

Bertha knew that the gardens she planned would require large amounts of water. In 1912 she drew a picture of an underground irrigation system that she wanted, created by a series of aqueducts.⁴²⁶ Bertha's system provided running water to all the houses and gardens on her property. Unlike her Chicago home, the lawns and gardens of The Oaks were Bertha's top priority.

Palmer surrounded herself with rose gardens, manicured lawns, flowering shrubs, sunken gardens, the pergola area, and the portion called the Jungle Walk. Because of the underground water system, Palmer could add an unusual feature that she designed for the Sunken Garden, a central water fountain that threw water to great heights.⁴²⁷ Bertha also planned the pergola area of her garden to provide the ranch with mushrooms, by hiding a mushroom cellar underneath the garden. Benches, tables, and urns were placed throughout

⁴²⁴Grismer, 313.

⁴²⁵The gardens Bertha developed are maintained today by the Gulf Coast Heritage Association.

⁴²⁶Williams, 78.

⁴²⁷Harner, 149.

Palmer's gardens, so guests could relax and enjoy her vast garden areas as they walked through them.⁴²⁸ In the January 1922 edition of *House Beautiful Magazine*, Virginia Robie wrote an article about Palmer's Florida home. Impressed by the variety of Palmer's beautiful gardens, Robie said:

The transitions are so subtle as to be scarcely noticed. Clever landscape work can convey one without a shock from a jungle to a sunken garden. Here formal clipped cypress, fountains, and formal statuary bring to mind the fact that West Coast Florida and Italy have much in common. . . . Here are artificial pools and a classic pergola from which the long vista is entirely in harmony.⁴²⁹

Palmer became widely recognized as an authority on Florida horticulture. In 1915 when fellow Chicagoan, James Deering ran into trouble landscaping his Miami mansion, he called on Bertha to help solve a problem with his gardens.⁴³⁰

Deering explained to Palmer that he was losing his boxwood trees almost as quickly as they were planted. Having read everything she could on gardening and horticulture, and having lost over 5000 boxwoods trees on her own property, Bertha discovered what could, and could not, grow in the humid, salty air of Florida.⁴³¹ Bertha informed her friend that the moist salt air would kill many varieties of trees, including boxwoods. Palmer advised her friend to plan low-growing wild jasmine to provide a border for his gardens as she had with

⁴²⁸Williams, 180.

⁴²⁹Virginia Robie, "The Oaks, Little Sarasota Bay." *House Beautiful* January 1922.

⁴³⁰"Vizcaya Palace and Gardens." Online. <http://members.aol.com/scalandtou/viz.htm>. 4 May 1997.

⁴³¹William Howard Adams, *Grounds for Change: Major Gardens of the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993) 88.

success in her own gardens.⁴³² Still not satisfied with just her gardens and orchards, Bertha made another addition to her Florida home.

Eighteen miles north of The Oaks, in the Myakka Lake Region, Palmer built Meadow Sweet Pastures to house her newest addition to the farm, a cattle ranch. While Palmer initially knew nothing of cattle ranching, she studied earnestly and learned quickly. When her cattle became infested with the age-old problem of ticks, Palmer decided to do something radical.⁴³³ Other veteran ranchers laughed when Palmer built a vat in which to dip her cows in pesticide. They all knew what this socialite prima donna, with pillow-soft hands, from Chicago could not possibly know, that ticks came from inside the cows.⁴³⁴ Bertha just did not believe that ticks could move from inside an animal to its exterior skin. When Palmer's cows were suddenly free of ticks, her neighboring farmers were not laughing any more. Instead, their anger grew when a woman, this woman, had discovered something they had missed.

According to *Florida Trend Magazine*, as a novice farmer, Palmer added insult to injury when she began importing prize Brahma bulls for breeding. Bertha discovered in her readings that for some reason Brahmas were always tick-free, so she bred them with the tick-infested Florida cow and successfully created a new tick-resistant breed of cattle.⁴³⁵

Bertha continued to anger her neighbors when she put fences around her land which

⁴³²Adams, *Grounds for Change*, 191.

⁴³³Brickle, p. 159.

⁴³⁴Ross, 236.

⁴³⁵Brickle, 161.

had previously been open range, to protect her new breed of cattle. Violence broke out and on several occasions irate neighbors cut the fences on the Palmer ranch and killed her cattle. Palmer tolerated the attacks on her cattle for a short while, but when the attacks began to include her black ranch hands, Palmer spoke up. In a letter written to the local grocery store owner, where Bertha knew these men gathered at night, she warned them that she would call the authorities if the attacks did not stop immediately.⁴³⁶ Palmer wrote:

.... No community could prosper with such a gang of lawless desperadoes
 Since buying Osprey I have been greatly annoyed by the annual criminal
 assaults on my place and on my innocent, unprotected, sleeping Negroes, by
 cowardly bands of armed men who came at night to shoot them and drive
 them away. Every investor wants to know first of all about labor conditions,
 and to find a community back away from the atrocities of the lawless Ku
 Klux era, finishes its case at once.⁴³⁷

After Bertha brought unwanted attention to the actions of her neighbors, the attacks on her ranch, and workers, stopped.

Another triumph for Bertha in Florida, and a blow to her ranching neighbors, came when the very first trainload of cattle ever shipped out of Florida to Texas came from the Palmer ranch.⁴³⁸ According to Sarasota historian Karl Grismer, if Palmer had lived longer her cattle ranch might have been one of the best in the state.⁴³⁹

It did not take long for the people of Sarasota to discover what the people of Chicago already knew, that Bertha not only possessed wealth, beauty, and grace, but she was a

⁴³⁶Ross, 236.

⁴³⁷Ross, 237.

⁴³⁸Harner, 149.

⁴³⁹Grismer, 254.

talented business woman who got what she wanted, or needed, without raising her voice. She was an intimidating and powerful woman, as the owner of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad was to discover.

After her move to Florida, Bertha asked railroad owner, Phillip Plant to kindly extend his railroad down to her Sarasota Farm. Having the railroad extended would make it easier for Bertha, her family, and guests, to reach her home. Plant did not think this was a wise or profitable business move, so he refused. Bertha did not ask Plant again. Palmer simply put into motion the plan to build her own rival railroad. Within a week Plant began extending his railroad to the Palmer farm.⁴⁴⁰

The one thing Bertha could not fix, buy, sell, or negotiate was the passage of time. In 1916, Henry Honoré, Bertha's beloved father died.⁴⁴¹ In part, Palmer bought her property in Florida to get him away from the cold winters of Chicago, without going abroad. Her father had been lonely since the death of her mother in 1906 and Bertha included him in most of her business dealings. After her father died, Bertha Palmer faced her greatest battle, one that she would ultimately lose.

Immediately after her father's death, Bertha discovered she had cancer. Having never complained about any illnesses before, Bertha did not start now. For two years she bravely battled breast cancer, undergoing a mastectomy a few months before her death.

⁴⁴⁰Chaperon, "Part one of Mrs. Potter Palmer Story." *Chicago Sunday Tribune* March 17, 1940. p.7.

⁴⁴¹ Telephone interview with Georgetown Visitation Convent historian, Sister Mary Virginia Brennan. In her remarks she recalled that her grandparents lived on Honoré Street in Chicago, named in honor of Henry Honoré. On a recent Chicago map, Honoré Street can be found off of Ashland Avenue, where Bertha lived as a child.

Until the last few weeks of her life Bertha ordered flowers for her Florida home and talked daily to Albert Blackburn the manager of The Oaks.⁴⁴²

Surrounded by her immediate family, Mrs. Bertha Honoré Palmer died on May 5, 1918, in Sarasota, Florida.⁴⁴³ After Bertha's death, flags flew at half-mast in Sarasota and in Chicago. Bertha's body was returned to Chicago, where thousands of people lined the streets hours before her funeral procession left her Lake Shore Drive home.⁴⁴⁴ Bertha's final will, discussed in the next chapter, displayed her business savvy, and her continued love and commitment, not just for her family, but for the city she loved so well.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴²Ross, 253.

⁴⁴³The *Chicago Tribune*, dated May 7, 1918, list the cause of Palmer's death as "the ailments attending advanced age" and pneumonia.

⁴⁴⁴Ross, 250-251.

⁴⁴⁵The *Chicago Tribune* dated May, 1918, noted that by disposing of her personal estate, and continuing the trust fund established by her husband, Palmer eventually saved her family nearly one and a half million dollars in estate taxes

Chapter Six: Bertha Palmer's Legacy

Bertha Palmer was a woman with one foot firmly planted in each of two centuries. She performed her duties in the private sphere in her invisible volunteer career, as the wife of Potter Palmer and the mother to two sons.⁴⁴⁶ However, like many wealthy women of her time, she also was a woman who was no longer content to remain totally within the home. Bertha took the financial and social benefits of her private sphere into the public sphere and never looked back. Once in the public sphere, Bertha used her position and wealth to do more than adorn the arm of her husband.

Bertha Honoré Palmer, or Mrs. Palmer, her preferred title, left a legacy that few women could match. Daughter, sister, wife, mother, woman's advocate, socialite, and entrepreneur, Bertha was a *new* type of woman.⁴⁴⁷ She was quiet and intelligent, delicate yet strong, educated, resourceful, determined and elegant. Bertha's commitment to Chicago, and its people, were well demonstrated during the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. During her role as the President to the Board of Lady Managers, she not only gained international acclaim for herself and Chicago, but a new place for women in a previously male-dominated arena.

When Bertha assumed the position as the President of the Board of Lady Managers she had no intention of being told "how, if, and where" women would participate. Bertha used the Exposition to introduce Chicago to the world, and the world to Chicago. However, the Columbian Exposition was more to Palmer than just Chicago's chance to shine. Palmer

⁴⁴⁶Daniels, ix.

⁴⁴⁷Woloch, 269 and Smith-Rosenberg, 175-177.

used the Exposition to help create a place for women in a man's world. She believed that if handled properly, the Exposition could be used to improve the lives of women around the world and would create mutual respect for women. In a letter to Sarah Hallowell after the Exposition, Mary Cassatt wrote about the difference between the treatment women received in France and in the United States and about Bertha Palmer. In 1894, after her experience with the World's Columbian Exposition Cassatt wrote:

...give me France. Women do not have to fight for recognition here if they do serious work. I supposed it is Mrs. Palmer's French blood which gives her organizing powers and her determination that women should be *someone* and not *something*. . . .⁴⁴⁸

Fiercely independent, Bertha Palmer believed that a woman should be more than a possession of men, to be used and abused as he saw fit. Before and after the Exposition, Bertha also provided financial support to many different organizations.

When Potter was alive, the Palmers gave generously to many charities, but Bertha personally gave an estimated \$25,000 a year to charitable organizations.⁴⁴⁹ She gave large amounts of money to her favorite charities and clubs, including the CWC, the Fortnightly Club, the Friday Club, and the Tuesday Art and Travel Club, which was a club that met Tuesday to discuss and view art. Still, as expected, Bertha did not neglect her affluent organizations and contributed to the Saddle and Cycle Club, an old and exclusive club on the North Side of Chicago.⁴⁵⁰ Although Bertha preferred horses to bicycles, she eventually

⁴⁴⁸Frederick Sweet, *Miss Mary Cassatt: Impressionist from Pennsylvania* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982) 136.

⁴⁴⁹Poole, 112.

⁴⁵⁰Ross, 68.

owned several automobiles and drove throughout Europe with her sons and niece. Bertha, an avid golfer, became a founding member, and supporter, of the Onwentsia Club in Lake Forest, Illinois.⁴⁵¹ The Onwentsia Club is still in operation today as a private country club and golf course.⁴⁵² Bertha gave her financial support to social and civic organizations, but she also gave generously of her time.

While she did not commit herself to a single cause like her friends, Frances Willard, Jane Addams, or Susan B. Anthony, Bertha Palmer used her wealth and position to try to create a better world for women. Through her work with the Chicago Woman's Club, Bertha helped to expose the deplorable conditions of Chicago's millinery workers. By bringing the workers into her home, Bertha helped the women to form a union and factory working conditions improved.⁴⁵³ Through her activities with the Civic Federation, Bertha worked as an equal with her male peers, to overcome the problems that affected those people in Chicago who could least afford it, the poor. While Palmer did not neglect her social obligations or her family, she cared about the safety, protection, and education of others. Bertha Palmer also helped to turn Chicago into a city that would rival the East.

Bertha continually worked to bring culture to Chicago, gave generously to the arts and established a yearly scholarship for deserving students at the Art Institute. After her death, Bertha remembered the Chicago Art Institute in her will by leaving \$100,000 worth

⁴⁵¹Ross, 70.

⁴⁵²Online. "America's Best Golf Courses." [Http://services.golfweb.com/cgi-bin/oc/ocdala](http://services.golfweb.com/cgi-bin/oc/ocdala) 7 July 1997.

⁴⁵³Ross, 47.

of her impressionist art. Indirectly, Bertha's relationship with the Institute, and her French art connections, helped the Art Institute obtain one of its greatest masterpieces, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, by painter El Greco.

Bertha's relationship with buyer Sarah Hallowell, artist, Mary Cassatt, and French gallery owner, Paul Durand-Ruel, helped the Art Institute to obtain the core of its old Masters collection. Hallowell discovered that El Greco's painting was on sale at Durand-Ruel's gallery.⁴⁵⁴ Sarah thought of Bertha and let her know about the El Greco. Palmer was not a collector of Old-World-Masterpieces, but she made the institute aware of the painting. Over the objections of many members of the Art Institutes Board, the painting by El Greco was purchased in 1906, for the low sum of \$40,000.⁴⁵⁵ The Institute acknowledges that without Bertha Palmer, this priceless painting would not belong to the Institute.⁴⁵⁶ Bertha also provided financial support for the city's local writers and poets.

In 1910, Bertha, along with one-hundred other prominent Chicagoans, agreed to provide financial support for five years, to help poet Harriet Monroe begin a magazine that recognized established and upcoming poets.⁴⁵⁷ Among others, Monroe helped to launch the career of poet Carl Sandburg after his poetry appeared in her magazine, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.⁴⁵⁸ Palmer's generosity continued until the day she died.

⁴⁵⁴Durand-Ruel 's gallery hosted Mary Cassatt's first solo exhibition in 1893.

⁴⁵⁵Chicago Art Institute, Biography of Bertha Palmer, 13.

⁴⁵⁶Chicago Art Institute, 15.

⁴⁵⁷Farr, 321.

⁴⁵⁸Farr, 322.

In 1914, when World War I began, Bertha was visiting her beloved Paris home. Forced to leave Paris immediately, Bertha quickly had most of her valuable pieces of art, porcelains, and pottery packed and placed into storage in London and Paris. Palmer placed many of her expensive, and famous pieces of jewelry, including her diamond tiaras and her often photographed pearl necklace, in Tiffany's Paris vault. Although Bertha managed to protect her business papers, some of her furnishings, and a portion of her valuable possessions, many of her belongings remained behind.⁴⁵⁹ After she left Paris, Bertha turned her Rue Fabert home over to the American Red Cross as a home for chaplains and never returned.⁴⁶⁰

At the age of sixty-one, and eight years after her husband's death, when other people her age were slowing down, or retiring, Bertha began a new business venture. Bertha's contributions in Sarasota, placed it on the map. After Bertha arrived, Sarasota became a winter haven for the rich from around the United States. Because of Bertha Palmer, the cultural, social, and economic development of Sarasota continued to grow, even after her death. Bertha's business venture in Florida, also helped to double her net worth.

In 1902, Bertha inherited about eight million dollars. At the time of her death, Bertha was worth more than \$16,000,000. She owned more than 150 pieces of property in Chicago, making her one of the city's largest land owners.⁴⁶¹ In her will, Bertha

⁴⁵⁹No source indicates if Palmer's possessions were returned to her, other than the jewelry from Tiffany's. Most of her jewelry was bequeathed to her sons' and daughter-in-laws' after her death.

⁴⁶⁰Ross, 244.

⁴⁶¹"The will of Mrs. Potter Palmer." *Chicago Tribune* May 7, 1918.

remembered more than thirty-four organizations and individuals. Among the specific charities listed in her will, Bertha gave the United Charities of Chicago \$100,000 to be used as they saw fit; the Children's Memorial Hospital of Chicago, \$10,000; the Legal Aid Society, \$5000; and as a provision previously mentioned, the curator of the Chicago Art Institute was allowed to choose up to \$100,000 of her art, many pieces which are now considered priceless.⁴⁶² Palmer also remembered her butlers, secretaries, former and current footman, and housemaids. Bertha left bequeaths to "the person who is my cook, and kitchen maid, at the time of my death."⁴⁶³ After she ordered all of her debts and funeral expenses paid, the second stipulation of Bertha's will gave her sons, Honoré and Potter II, \$400,000 each. This money was to be used only to "establish and maintain, or to assist in establishing or maintaining such philanthropic or educational institutions, not undertaken before my death."⁴⁶⁴ This nearly one million dollars was used to establish scholarships at the Chicago Art Institute among others. Bertha, a strong advocate of education, considered each new person, country, or occasion, the opportunity to continue her own education.

Although Palmer "mastered the politely useless arts of towel hemming and the making of wax camellias," throughout her life she continued to self-educate herself about any person, or topic, with which she was unfamiliar.⁴⁶⁵ In her autobiography, Julia Grant

⁴⁶²Copy of the will of Bertha Palmer, filed May 21, 1918 in the Probate Court of Cook County, Illinois. Personal Papers of Mrs. Potter Palmer, CHS.

⁴⁶³"The will of Mrs. Potter Palmer." *Chicago Tribune* May 7, 1918.

⁴⁶⁴"The will of Mrs. Potter Palmer." *Chicago Tribune* May 7, 1918.

⁴⁶⁵Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity & Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 47.

Cantacuzène, remembered that her Aunt Bertha was always reading something.⁴⁶⁶ Once while traveling in Europe, Julia remembered waking up in the night and finding her aunt:

... sitting bolt upright in bed, her hair coiffure in perfect order, her dark eyes bright and alert as she studied pamphlets and books, to nourish future conversations. The subject might be forestry, or ballistics, or genealogy, or woman suffrage, or ceramics, or the Tang dynasty, or the French châteaux, or British politics, and she would corral the gist of what she read and use it to good purpose in all the proper places.⁴⁶⁷

Many people are well-informed on a few subjects, but Bertha made sure that she was informed on many subjects. Regardless of class, Bertha made sure that any guest in her home felt welcomed. According to Julia, Bertha would study a guests' likes and dislikes, the history and culture of the country he or she might be from, and any other information that would put the guest at ease in her home, and in her presence.⁴⁶⁸ Bertha Palmer tried to help those who did not ask for help and those that did.

In the Chicago Historical Society there is a series of letters from an English immigrant to Bertha Palmer.⁴⁶⁹ In the first letter dated April 9, 1894, Matthew Brierkey wrote Bertha asking for some help finding a job in Chicago. Bertha responded by writing to him, welcoming him to Chicago, and directing him to a man who could help him find a job.⁴⁷⁰ In a series of letters over a fifteen-month period, Brierkey often wrote to Bertha. In

⁴⁶⁶Julia lived to be ninety-nine years old and died in 1975 in Connecticut.

⁴⁶⁷Ross, 200.

⁴⁶⁸Cantacuzène, 155.

⁴⁶⁹Fifteen letters to Bertha Palmer from Matthew Brierkey, dated from April 9, 1894 to August 22, 1895. CHS, personal papers of Mrs. Potter Palmer.

⁴⁷⁰This information is from another letter to Palmer from Brierkey, date May 11, 1894.

a letter dated July 22, 1895, Brierkey wrote that he considered Bertha to be the "real first lady of the United States," and in many ways she was during the 1893 Exposition.⁴⁷¹

If Bertha Palmer had a weakness, perhaps it was her desire to do what she thought was best for others without asking those involved. Bertha Palmer "asked" little of others, either advice or information, because she did not have to. As Bertha worked during the Exposition to gather statistics on the lives of women of the world, when she invited the millinery workers into her home, and during her civic club work, Bertha felt that she knew what was best for the women involved. She felt that her education, her position, and her desire to make a difference, well-prepared her to make such decisions for other women. Given the times in which she lived, the advances she helped to create for women, and for the cities of Chicago and Sarasota, Bertha's social and civic work must be classified as successful.

After her death, a newspaper in New York wrote an article about Mrs. Potter Palmer.

The article stated:

With levees, soirees and promenades now in the dim perspective, we can look upon Mrs. Palmer's time and see what will be missed in the new ensemble. For each age has its afterglow, and none more brilliant than the one just passed. Poets, painters and novelist drew upon such as she to make lovely pictures of grandes dames.⁴⁷²

It would have delighted Bertha to receive such glowing comments from the city that found few positive things to write about Chicago or its people.

Bertha Palmer was able to accomplish so much during her life due to many different

⁴⁷¹Letter to Mrs. Potter Palmer, July 22, 1894, from Matthew Brierkey.

⁴⁷²Dedmon, 134.

reasons. Born to affluent parents, Bertha Honoré Palmer obtained an excellent education. Her personality, one of quiet strength, determination, and benevolence, served her well. Through her marriage to Potter Palmer, Bertha acquired the wealth and power she needed to accomplish most of her goals. Moving into the public sphere quickly, with such power, Bertha also became the object of criticism and jealousy. Literary critic Carolyn Heilbrun's words may explain the actions of Palmer's opponents. Heilbrun states, "Women who acquire power are more likely to be criticized for it than men who have always had it," and Bertha Palmer was certainly powerful.⁴⁷³

Although Bertha loved her Florida home, Chicago *was* home, with all of its joyous and painful memories. Like her father and her husband, Bertha believed in Chicago's greatness. Her involvement in social reform epitomized her love of Chicago, and the meaning of Noblesse Oblige.

Though she lived and dressed as a proper Victorian woman, Bertha spoke and acted as a "new woman."⁴⁷⁴ Self-assured, strong, and independent, Bertha did not marry after her husband died. Much like the new woman emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century, Bertha turned away from the prospect of moving to another home as a good and submissive wife.⁴⁷⁵ Instead Bertha bought and ran her own real-estate business. She did not work because she had to. Like many middle and upper-class women of the Progressive Era,

⁴⁷³Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1988) 16.

⁴⁷⁴Woloch, 269 and Smith-Rosenberg, 175.

⁴⁷⁵Dorothy and Carl Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (New York: Anchor Book, 1993) 52.

she worked because she wanted to.⁴⁷⁶ In nearly every role she fulfilled and every endeavor she undertook, Bertha committed herself fully.

In their book, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*, Dorothy and Carl Schneider described the legacy created by women of Progressive Era. According to the Schneiders' these women:

. . . learned to use the power of government to effect social and economic reform. . . . They engaged in political action lobbying, building spheres of influence, exerting political pressure through their organizations. . . . [and] they tackled social ills. . . . [these] women retained an acute sense of themselves as women, different from men, able to do some things men could not do, in some ways better than men. They defined themselves first as women. They associated themselves in groups with other women. And as women, they changed their world--and ours.⁴⁷⁷

A woman of the Gilded Age, Bertha Palmer became this New Woman of the Progressive Era.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶Schneider, 77.

⁴⁷⁷Schneider, 246.

⁴⁷⁸According to a *Chicago Tribune* article date Wednesday, 1996, the city of Chicago has renamed a city block to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Palmer House Hotel. According to the article, the block of East Monroe Street between State Street and Wabash Avenue has been renamed Palmer House Hilton Way, and the hotel address is changed from 17 E. Monroe St. to, One Palmer House Hilton Way.

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VITA

In 1995 I became the first of eleven children to graduate from college. This degree came after twenty-five-years of marriage to the most amazing man I have ever known. With his help and support, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Science from St. Mary of the Woods College, with a triple minor in history, sociology, and political science. In the fall of 1995, I was accepted to the Valparaiso School of Law. Instead, I began my working on my master degree at Indiana University in South Bend and graduated in 1998.

While raising six children, working part-time, and volunteering in the Elkhart schools, I maintained a 3.76 GPA in my undergraduate work and an A average in graduate work. I was also selected to participate in the Gender Seminar at Notre Dame University, in April of 1998. A summary of this thesis was presented at this Seminar.

Where I go from here is still uncertain. I am currently taking classes to complete my Indiana Teaching Certificate and I am investigating the possibility of pursuing a doctorate degree in history or sociology. I will also search for additional information about Bertha Palmer and explore the possibility of the publication of this thesis.

Regardless of my future, my quest for knowledge will never end. The main thing I have discovered through my years of education, is the reality that the more I know, the more I am aware of what I do not know.